

**TRANS-TASMAN RELATIONS IN THE
SECOND WORLD WAR**

A thesis
submitted for the Degree
of
Master of Arts in History
in the
University of Canterbury
by
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University of Canterbury
1997

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Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
	LIST OF MAPS AND TABLES	i
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
	ABSTRACT	iii
1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	STRANGERS ACROSS THE TASMAN: AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND 1938-1939	5
3	INDEPENDENTLY FOLLOWING SIMILAR POLICIES: AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND, SEPTEMBER 1939-DECEMBER 1941	19
4	AUSTRALIA'S AND NEW ZEALAND'S EFFORTS TO GET A VOICE IN LONDON AND WASHINGTON	44
5	THE CRISIS POINT OF TRANS-TASMAN RELATIONS: DIVERGENT POLICIES FROM NOVEMBER 1942-JUNE 1943	71
6	THE AUSTRALIAN-NEW ZEALAND AGREEMENT (THE CANBERRA PACT)	87
7	CONCLUSION	109
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	112

List of Maps and Tables

MAP		PAGE
I	The ABDACOM Area	49
II	The Southwest Pacific	66
III	Pacific & Indian Ocean Command Areas, 1942-1943.	67

TABLE		PAGE
I	New Zealand's Exports by percentage	21
II	Australia's Exports by percentage	21

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the dedicated staff at the National Archives who provided an excellent service and a top working environment. Malcolm Templeton at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Library kindly allowed me to look at the *Berendsen Memoirs*. I also wish to thank to the staff at the International Documents Collection of the Parliamentary Library who kindly sent me material.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisors, Professor McIntyre and Dr Connolly. Specifically I want to thank Professor McIntyre for the archival material he lent to me and for his invaluable comments on my drafts. I also wish to thank Dr Connolly for the thorough, logical and invaluable advice that he gave me on my drafts.

Finally, I am grateful to my family for their continued support and encouragement.

Abstract

This thesis deals with the politics, foreign policies and diplomacy and of Australia and New Zealand in the Second World War focusing upon relations between the two countries. It is a study of the decline of the British Empire-Commonwealth and rise of the United States and the differing ways in which the Australian and New Zealand governments reacted to these dramatic changes.

The Australian and New Zealand governments were drawn together twice to meet two uncomfortable outside influences - one a threatening Japanese invasion, and secondly United States intentions in the Pacific, affecting Australian freedom of action.

The Japanese threat was significant because the Australian and New Zealand governments reacted in different ways to the declining power of the Empire-Commonwealth in relation to the rising power of the United States in the Pacific. The Australian government's relations with the Empire-Commonwealth soured dramatically as Curtin's government appeared to move out of the imperial framework and sought close relations with the United States. The New Zealand government, in contrast, was more inclined to remain within the imperial framework and did not react dramatically to the decline of the Empire-Commonwealth.

These divergent reactions help to explain the differences of opinion between the Australian and New Zealand governments over manpower and the location of their armed forces - respectively in Pacific and the Mediterranean.

The second outside uncomfortable influence, the United States increasing interest in the Pacific from mid 1943, led to the Australian-New Zealand Agreement which was a landmark in trans-Tasman relations.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis deals with the politics, foreign policies and diplomacy of Australia and New Zealand in the Second World War focusing upon relations between the two countries. It is a study of the decline of the British Empire-Commonwealth and rise of the United States and the differing ways in which the Australian and New Zealand governments reacted to these dramatic changes. The official policies of the Australian and New Zealand governments are considered, focusing upon the politicians and diplomats, and paying special attention to trans-Tasman relations.

Much has been written about the decline of the British Empire-Commonwealth, and the rise of the United States during the Second World War.¹ Within this framework there have been a considerable number of publications written about Australia's policies in the Second World War. Hasluck wrote the comprehensive two volume official history,² whereas Robertson has described Australia's war experiences.³ Horner has edited a readable collection of essays about the military side of the war.⁴ He also has provided a credible account of Australia's evolution of an independent foreign policy.⁵ Bell has discussed Australia's relations with the United States⁶ while staunch Australian nationalist Day described Australia's relations with Britain.⁷ However, there has been a dearth of material written about Australia's relations with New Zealand during this period.

¹ For example see Wm.R. Louis, *Imperialism at Bay: The United States and Decolonisation of the British Empire, 1941-1945*, (Oxford, 1977); H.P. Willmott, *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific strategies to April 1942*, (Maryland, 1982); S. Dockrill, (Ed) *From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima: the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific 1941-1945*, (New York, 1994); and A. Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific*, (London & New York, 1989). For a broader survey see P. Calvocoressi, G. Wint & J. Pritchard, *Total War: The Causes and Courses of the Second World War, volume II: The Greater East Asian and Pacific Conflict*, (London, 1989).

² P. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941* (volume I); P. Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945* (volume II) (both published in Canberra respectively in 1952 & 1970).

³ J. Robertson, *Australia at War, 1939-1945*, (Canberra 1981).

⁴ D. Horner, (Ed) *The Battles that Shaped Australia*, (St Leonards, NSW, 1994).

⁵ D. Horner, *High Command: Australia's struggle for an independent war strategy, 1939-1945*, (St Leonards, NSW, 1992). See A. Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy 1938-1965*, (London, 1967). See also D. Day, (Ed) *Brave New World: Dr H.V. Evatt and Australian Foreign Policy 1941-1949*, (St Lucia, 1996).

⁶ R. Bell, *Unequal Allies: Australian-American relations and the Pacific War*, (Melbourne, 1977).

⁷ Days' accounts are more controversial but well written. See D. Day, *The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia & The Onset of the Pacific War 1939-1943*, (New York, 1989); D. Day, *Reluctant Nation:*

New Zealand has received less coverage on the Second World War than Australia, apart from the fifty volume official history. In this collection Wood wrote the volume on external affairs.⁸ There is, however, a distinct lack of debate on New Zealand's experience in the war. Lissington's accounts touched on the war but focused upon New Zealand's relations with Japan and the United States.⁹ Trotter discussed New Zealand's relations with Japan but focused on the postwar period.¹⁰

Very little has been written about trans-Tasman relations. Sinclair dealt with relations between Australia and New Zealand both before and after the Second World War but has omitted the war period.¹¹ Alan and Robin Burnett's account¹² touched on military aspects of the war and mentioned the Anzac connection but its primary focus was upon Australia and New Zealand after the Second World War, particularly trade, immigration and transport. Moore¹³ referred to the war and mentioned both Australia and New Zealand in the context. His focus, however, was Australian-American relations and consequently he has not seriously considered Australian-New Zealand relations. Kay edited the comprehensive documents volume on the Australian-New Zealand Agreement.¹⁴ Reese¹⁵ provided the closest to a comprehensive survey of trans-Tasman relations in the context of the decline of the Empire-Commonwealth and the rise of the United States. What he wrote is sound, however he omitted mentioning the war before Pearl Harbor. His account continues well into the postwar period concluding with the Vietnam War and is largely based on printed sources. Because of his chosen period, Reese's study inevitably focuses upon Australia's and New Zealand's relations with the United States and trans-Tasman relations are a minor theme. X

Australia and the Allied defeat of Japan 1942-1945, (Melbourne, 1992); D. Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, (Melbourne, 1993).

⁸ F.L.W. Wood, *The New Zealand People at War: political and external affairs*, (Wellington, 1971).

⁹ M.P. Lissington, *New Zealand and the United States, 1840-1944*, (Wellington, 1972); and M.P. Lissington, *New Zealand and Japan, 1900-1941*, (Wellington, 1972).

¹⁰ A. Trotter, *New Zealand and Japan, 1945-1952: the occupation and the peace treaty*, (London, 1990).

¹¹ K. Sinclair, (Ed) *Tasman Relations: New Zealand and Australia, 1788-1988*, (Auckland, 1987).

¹² A. Burnett & R. Burnett, *The Australia and New Zealand Nexus*, (Canberra, 1978).

¹³ J.H. Moore (Ed), *The American Alliance: Australia, New Zealand and the United States, 1940-1970*, (North Melbourne, 1970).

¹⁴ R. Kay, *The Australian-New Zealand Agreement 1944*, (Wellington, 1972).

¹⁵ T.R. Reese, *Australia, New Zealand and the United States: a survey of International Relations 1941-1968*, (Oxford, 1969).

This thesis is a modest attempt to break new ground. It goes further than Reese because it deals with the Second World War more fully, considers trans-Tasman relations prior to Pearl Harbor, and uses some archival sources. Because of my chosen time-frame (1938-1944) this thesis not only deals with Australia's and New Zealand's relations with the United States but also deals with their relations with the Empire-Commonwealth. It focuses on trans-Tasman relations within the context of the declining power of the Empire-Commonwealth and the rising power of the United States and examines the contrasting responses of Australia and New Zealand to this changing world order. It is a study of trans-Tasman relations in a vital time of transition.

Chapter two looks at the state of trans-Tasman relations before the Second World War. The Australian and New Zealand governments operated within an imperial framework based on the British Commonwealth of Nations¹⁶ and consequently, while their relations with Britain were strong, relations between each other were seen as less important. The effect of the outbreak of the Second World War upon trans-Tasman relations is examined in chapter three.

The dramatic entry of Japan in December 1941 marked a turning point in trans-Tasman relations. Both were concerned with the uncomfortable outside influence of the threat of Japanese invasion. Their reactions to this threat are examined in chapter four, as are their contrasting reactions to the decline of the Empire-Commonwealth and the rise of the United States in this period. This crucial transitional period had a deep effect upon the Australian and New Zealand governments. Chapter five looks at how this helps to explain their later differences of opinions about manpower, the locations of their armed forces and their approaches to external affairs.

The second uncomfortable outside influence faced by the Australian and New Zealand governments ~~faced~~ was the United States' intentions in the Pacific from mid 1943. This is the focus of chapter six. This concern led to the Australian-New Zealand Agreement, which was a landmark in trans-Tasman relations.

¹⁶ The British Commonwealth of Nations will hereafter be referred as the Empire-Commonwealth.

The Second World War saw the first phase of Australian-New Zealand diplomatic relations. The Tasman neighbours came together because they were now threatened by new outside influences as never before. Japan's bid for hegemony, Britain's admission that its power in the Pacific was limited, with the emergence of the United States as a super power presented challenges to Australia and New Zealand which required new sources of support without abandoning traditional ties.

Chapter 2

Strangers across the Tasman: Australia and New Zealand 1938-1939

Australia and New Zealand had similar pre-war plans and policies. This was because they both adhered to the system of imperial defence that was centred upon London. Both the southern dominions were considered to be distant outposts of the Empire-Commonwealth. This distance was compensated for by the Royal Navy which maintained the unity of the Empire-Commonwealth by attempting to control the seas. From the early 1920s both Australia's and New Zealand's defence policies were reliant upon the Main Fleet reaching the naval base at Singapore as soon as hostilities began in the Far East. The Singapore base became the symbol of the presence of the Empire-Commonwealth in the Indian Ocean, and to a lesser degree, in the Pacific.

The Australian and New Zealand governments held remarkably similar views upon defence and foreign policy considering the low level of consultation between the two dominions. That they held similar views was determined by their sharing similar assumptions that were generally based upon concepts of imperial defence. They had far greater contact with Britain than they did with each other. Consequently, they were influenced by the information they received from Britain. Consultation across the Tasman was minimal and despite this both dominions developed such similar policies in the period leading up to the outbreak of the war in Europe.

Trans-Tasman relations prior to the Second World War can only be understood within the imperial framework in which they operated. Both Australia and New Zealand, as dominions, organised much of their defence and foreign policy through Britain. Although neither country had adopted the 1931 Statute of Westminster, this did not discourage either from pursuing independent policies when they so desired. The Australian and New Zealand governments communicated with Britain regularly, but communications with each other were the exception rather than the rule. This was a choice as the Trans-Tasman cable had been installed at Cable Bay, near Nelson, in 1876.¹ The system of imperial communication

¹ I. McGibbon, 'Australian-New Zealand Defence Relations to 1939', in Sinclair *Tasman Relations: New Zealand and Australia, 1788-1988*, (Auckland, 1987) p 164-165.

was complex. If the New Zealand Prime Minister wanted to cable the British Prime Minister he would first give his cable to the Governor-General who would send it to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs who would pass on the message to the British Prime Minister.² This system was continued in New Zealand until 1 February 1941 when the Governor-General was eliminated from the chain of communication. This was because of delays that were caused when the Prime Minister wished to send a cable when the Governor General was absent from Wellington.

The low level of contact between the Australian and New Zealand governments was not surprising considering the low levels of trade that crossed the Tasman Sea in the 1930s. However, Australia and New Zealand had not always had poor trading relations. In the nineteenth century the Tasman neighbours traded heavily with each other. For a time Australia was New Zealand's greatest export market, and its main supplier of imports. In 1865, 70% of New Zealand's exports went to Australia and even as late as 1871, 44 % of total exports went to Australia.³ New Zealand's imports were far more diversified in their markets than its exports. Despite this, Australia was the greatest source of imports peaking at 60% in 1862. Between 1875 and 1914, Britain replaced Australia as New Zealand's main export market consuming approximately 80% of total exports in 1915, 1916, and 1917. Imports from Australia also decreased from the late nineteenth century, falling as low as 7% of the total in 1929.⁴ Britain continued as both Australia's and New Zealand's main export market. This trend was encouraged by the Imperial Economic Conference of 1932, where it was decided that tariffs were to be adjusted in a way that gave preference to British trade and that of countries in the British Empire. Despite this incentive, the quantity of trans-Tasman trade remained extremely low. In 1938 and 1939, less than 4 % of New Zealand's total exports went to Australia.⁵ In the same period less than 14 % of New Zealand's imports came from Australia. As the Australian market was far larger than the New Zealand one, this accounted for an average of only 4.6 % of Australia's exports in

² *Documents on New Zealand External Relations Volume 1*, R. Kay (Ed) *The Australia-New Zealand Agreement*, (Wellington, 1972) p XXV. (Hereafter referred to as DNZER 1)

³ *The New Zealand Official Year Book 1945*, (Compiled in the Census & Statistics Department of the Dominion of New Zealand, Wellington, 1945), p 694.

⁴ *Ibid*, p 713.

⁵ *The New Zealand Official Year Book 1940*, (Compiled in the Census & Statistics Department of the Dominion of New Zealand, Wellington, 1940), p 240. *The New Zealand Official Year Book 1941*, (Compiled in the Census & Statistics Department of the Dominion of New Zealand, Wellington, 1941), p 195.

1937-38 and 1938-39. Australia's imports from across the Tasman were even smaller than its exports in 1938-39, New Zealand supplying only 1.9 % of total imports.⁶ The level of trade between Australia and New Zealand in 1938 to 1939 was at best modest and at worst trivial. New Zealand's main exports were meat, wool, butter and cheese, while Australia's main exports were meat (7.8% of the total) and wool (34% of the total), minerals and metals, some dairy products and fruit, some sugar and hides.⁷ Australia and New Zealand were competing for export markets when they exported the same goods.

McGibbon notes that while Australian-New Zealand relations were close during war time, they swung to the other extreme of indifference during peacetime.⁸ The term 'Anzac' was coined in Egypt in 1915 after the wartime bond that was formed by Australians and New Zealanders on the battlefield at Gallipoli. Despite the shared experience of war that was exemplified by Gallipoli, any close relations that Australia and New Zealand had enjoyed faded after the First World War. Close trans-Tasman relations were not maintained without the significant unifying force of war. Subsequently, relations between the Australian and New Zealand governments had reached the level of indifference and apathy by 1938-1939.

The Munich crisis in October 1938 stimulated the New Zealand government to review its defences. Italy, although a signatory of the Munich Agreement, was now considered a potential threat. This was because of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 in breach of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and its assistance to General Franco in the Spanish Civil War.⁹ As the threat of the Italian Navy to the Royal Navy had not entered previous strategic equations, New Zealand's defence needed to be reassessed. Consequently, Carl Berendsen, head of the Prime Minister's Department, said that the British Fleet would take some time to arrive, and even suggested the possibility that it might not arrive at all. It was inevitable that New Zealand would be left in the lurch for some time. Berendsen made the following observation to the Council of Defence on 21

⁶ *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia No. 34 - 1941*, (Prepared under Instructions from The Honourable the Treasurer, Canberra), p 663.

⁷ B. Dyster & D. Meredith, *Australia in International Economy in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge/Melbourne, 1990) p 149.

⁸ McGibbon, 'Australian-New Zealand Defence Relations,' p 164-165.

⁹ P. Calvocoressi & G. Wint & J. Pritchard, *Total War: The Causes and Courses of the Second World War, volume 1: The Western Hemisphere*, (London, 1989) p 69-73, & 84.

December 1938: 'we know with complete certainty that the British ships required to adequately support Singapore in the case of a war both in the East and the West are not only not built, they are not approved'.¹⁰ Essentially, the fundamental issue was not when the fleet would arrive but whether such a fleet even existed, and if not, did the British intend to build or buy one? Such concerns were fully shared by Australian defence planners. They were best typified by the Australian Chief of the General Staff, John Lavarack, whose motto was 'Trust in the Navy [Royal Navy] but keep your powder dry'.¹¹ Generally, Australia voiced its defence concerns in a stronger, more forceful way than New Zealand did, partly because New Zealand was further from Japan and felt less threatened than Australia.

That Singapore had become a compelling symbol was evident in the ceremony that surrounded the opening of its naval base on 14 February 1938 even though its defences and docking facilities were not completed. Although it was said to be an impregnable fortress, there may have been some quiet apprehension in New Zealand defence circles at the apparent complacency in the Admiralty. New Zealand's defence planners were also concerned that Fiji remained undefended, although it was vital to New Zealand's defence. If Fiji was to fall into enemy hands, an air attack could be launched upon New Zealand from Suva. Trans-Tasman co-ordination of defence to prevent strategically valuable Pacific Islands falling into hostile hands was lacking at this stage.

The United States might have been a potential ally for Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific. However, neither country was ever certain of United States military support. The United States government does not seem to have had a consistent policy towards the Tasman neighbours. Attempts by Australia and New Zealand to foster closer relations with the United States met with a variety of responses which, when taken together, seemed to be ambiguous. The United States was strongly isolationist in the 1930s. In October 1935 President Roosevelt told Joseph Aloysius Lyons, the Australian Prime Minister, 'that never again would the United States be drawn into a European war, regardless of the circumstances'.¹² This attitude combined with the various Neutrality Acts, made it seem

¹⁰ I. McGibbon, *Blue Water Rationale: the naval defence of New Zealand, 1914-1942*, (Wellington, 1981) p 310.

¹¹ Horner, *High Command*, p 11.

¹² Bell, *Unequal Allies*, p 11.

very unlikely that the United States would enter a European war. However, the United States would be more readily drawn into a Pacific War as this would not involve sending expeditionary forces to Europe. However, the Australian and New Zealand governments' impressions of the United States government's attitude towards entering a war in the Pacific remained ambiguous. Yet, on 14 April 1939, the United States displayed some friendliness towards Australia and New Zealand. Joseph Kennedy, the United States Ambassador in Britain, commented that, if Japan threatened Australia or New Zealand, 'whether by way of a direct descent upon them or indirectly in the form of an expedition against Singapore, it would be a matter to which the USA could hardly remain for long indifferent'.¹³ These friendly words contrasted dramatically with indications Australia received only the next month that the United States was in fact indifferent to the plight of Australia and New Zealand. In May, Stanley Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner in London, was in Washington where he had a conversation with Roosevelt. He raised the possibility of a Japanese attack on Australia and received the ambiguous answer, 'Well Australia is a hell of a way off'.¹⁴ Sadly for Australia, and also for New Zealand, this comment reflected the views of the United States' Cabinet. However, this apparent indifference did not last long. Three months later New Zealand gained a vastly different impression of the United States attitudes towards meeting the threat of Japan in the Pacific. Walter Nash, Minister of Finance, was in the United States (returning home from Britain) when he had a meeting with Roosevelt on 11 August 1939. Over a cup of tea, Roosevelt chatted about the recent visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth and asked Nash how he was getting on with his wife. When Nash eventually had the opportunity to raise the question of New Zealand's defence, the President replied that the United States would protect New Zealand and Australia if they were threatened by Japan.¹⁵ These encouraging words, comforting though they certainly must have been, were by no means a formal military commitment from the United States. Australia and New Zealand had received mixed messages from the United States and consequently they did not know how they would react if Japan did prove to be a threat.

¹³ McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 334-335.

¹⁴ Note by S.M. Bruce of Conversation with F.D. Roosevelt; *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, vol II, (Canberra, 1976) Doc 82, attachment II. (Hereafter referred to as DAFP II)

¹⁵ K. Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, (Auckland, 1976) p 189.

The Australian and New Zealand governments had little more than token levels of contact with each other in the year or so before the Second World War. It was common that the Australian and New Zealand governments, although only separated by the Tasman Sea, heard about each others' activities through Britain, literally half a world away. To rectify this peculiar situation Michael Joseph Savage, the New Zealand Prime Minister, on 23 September 1938 cabled Lyons suggesting that they exchange information directly with each other rather than through Britain. He cited the example of an Australian defence paper that reached New Zealand as a British paper. Savage suggested to Lyons that 'we establish the principle of complete mutual interchange of information between Governments as opposed to between individual services'.¹⁶ Such information would be useful in peace times and could undoubtedly become invaluable during war. Nothing was done immediately and two months later Lieutenant Colonel William George Stevens, Secretary of the Organisation for National Security, commented that it is 'really absurd, in that we are hearing of the others activities per medium of CID [Committee of Imperial Defence] papers'.¹⁷ Lyons did not reply until 3 March the following year, even though Savage gave him a friendly reminder on 22 December.¹⁸ Lyons effectively poured cold water over New Zealand's suggestion. Although he agreed 'in principle' to the exchange of information, he did not explain which information Australia would be willing to exchange. He was adamant that any information relating to how Australian policy was formulated was to remain confidential. However, Lyons did see value in the exchange of broad policy and plans. He agreed to forward to New Zealand the *Australian War Book*. This was the whole of Australia's national planning for war explained in one book. Its aim was to provide clear instructions to all authorities on what their responsibilities were in effecting a smooth transition from peace to war. This book was modelled upon the *British War Book*. Military information was already exchanged across the Tasman between the armed services and Lyons suggested that the New Zealand government make use of this source rather than exchange the same information through political channels. Obviously, the Australian government was not receptive to the prospect of closer political relations with New Zealand.

¹⁶ Savage to Lyons, 23 September 1938, *DNZER I*, Doc 1.

¹⁷ McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 310-311.

¹⁸ *DAFP I*, Doc 355.

After this tentative exchange Savage, on 22 December 1938, asked the Australian government for its views upon holding a defence conference in New Zealand, noting that the British had already agreed to the proposal. The Australian Government agreed on 11 January 1939 that the conference would be held in New Zealand. The aim of this conference was to discuss the strategic situation in the Pacific, in particular the ability of the British Fleet to come to Singapore and its expected time of arrival after the outbreak of hostilities in the East. It was also intended that this conference would provide an opportunity to 'discuss closer liaison between Australia and New Zealand'.¹⁹ The New Zealand government recognised that trans-Tasman relations were virtually non-existent and that as war in Europe seemed imminent, this situation should be addressed.

By taking the initiative in organising this conference, the New Zealand government revealed its fears about security and defence. It wished to re-examine Britain's ability to defend Australia and New Zealand now that Italy was considered a potential threat. Sir Harry Batterbee, the newly arrived British High Commissioner to New Zealand, bought out with him a Committee of Imperial Defence paper entitled 'New Zealand Co-operation in the Imperial Defence', dated 1 February 1939. This paper renewed Britain's intention to defend New Zealand: 'It will thus be seen that no change has occurred to affect the considerations which governed the undertaking given at the Imperial Conference in 1937, that in the event of war with Japan we should send a Fleet to Eastern waters irrespective of the situation elsewhere.'²⁰ This qualifier 'irrespective of the situation elsewhere' was the strongest assurance to date that the New Zealand government had received from Britain that it would defend the dominions in the Pacific. A Chiefs of Staff Paper dated 4 April 1939 based New Zealand's defence upon this promise that the British Fleet would intervene against a hostile Japan.²¹ New Zealand's defence still rested upon Singapore and the arrival of the fleet.

Australia's lack of enthusiasm for the conference was revealed on 1 April (only 13 days before the Conference was opened in Wellington) when Savage was told that the Australian Minister for Defence was unable to attend. This was because of the political

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Doc 335.

²⁰ McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 313.

²¹ Chiefs of Staff Paper, EA 1 81/4/3 pt 1, (*National Archives*).

turmoil ^{1/1} on Canberra following the death of Lyons and the resulting struggle for the Premiership that was won by Robert Menzies.

The Pacific Defence Conference opened on 14 April in Wellington. Both Australia and Britain failed to send ministerial representatives. It was attended by service delegates from Britain and Australia and New Zealand MPs, Civil Servants, Chiefs of Staff and the High Commissioner for Western Samoa.²² It was decided that the discussions and proceedings of the conference should be secret and given no publicity. There were three main topics at the conference: strategic considerations, air routes and supply. After general discussion the conference split into three committees to consider these three aspects. Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, Australian Chief of Naval Staff, admitted that Australia had in very recent times been preoccupied with domestic matters. He said 'I confess I wish that one of the Australian Ministers had been able to come over, but owing to affairs and circumstances that was impossible. As you know, they are facing a session very shortly and owing to the death of Mr. Lyons the issue has been further complicated'.²³ At the conference the New Zealand delegation was suitably impressed by the defence measures that Australia had and was taking at Port Kembla, Port Moresby and Darwin. Australia's preparations for war had begun well before this conference. On 16 January 1939 Lyons had said that Australia's planning for war was so extensive that it had 'ramifications affecting every section of the community and, in fact, every individual'.²⁴ The national planning for war originated in the Defence Department and was most fully explained in the *Commonwealth War Book*, which had already been forwarded to New Zealand.

²² The Conference was attended by the following. *New Zealand Delegation*: M.J. Savage (Prime Minister), P. Fraser (Deputy Prime Minister), W. Nash (Minister of Finance), F. Jones (Minister of Defence), D. Sullivan (Minister of Industries & Commerce), Maj-Gen J.E. Duigan (Chief of General Staff), Commodore H.E. Horan (Chief of Naval Staff), Gp Cpt H.W.L. Saunders (Chief of Air Staff), Gp Cpt T.M. Wilkes (Controller Civil Aviation), C.A. Berendsen (Permanent Head of PMs Dept), B.C. Ashwin (Secretary to the Treasury), L.J. Schmitt (Secretary of Council of Defence). *British Delegation*: H. Batterbee (High Commissioner to NZ), H. Luke (Governor of Fiji & High Commissioner for Western Pacific), Vice-Admiral R. Colvin (representing the Admiralty), Maj-Gen P.J. Mackesy (representing the War Office), Air Marshal A. Longmore (representing Air Ministry). *Australian Delegation*: Vice Admiral R. Colvin (Chief of Naval Staff, Australian Naval Board), Col V.A.H. Sturdee (representing Australian Military Board). All advisers & secretaries omitted from this list.

²³ *Verbatim of Pacific Defence Conference*, p B2. (Hereafter referred to as Verbatim)

²⁴ Hasluck, *Govt & People vol 1*, p 120.

On the first morning of the conference Berendsen launched a methodical and logical analysis of the main fleet to Singapore strategy, the strength of the British Fleet and its expected time of arrival in Eastern waters. He examined the worst possible scenario, a war against Germany, Italy and Japan. All the British evaluations that the Australian and New Zealand governments had received before the conference had not taken into account the possibility of a hostile Italy. They did not consider the effects that a hostile Italian Navy would have upon the Royal Navy's ability to defend the southern dominions in the Pacific. Berendsen exposed the weakness of the British assurance of June 1937 that a fleet would come to New Zealand if hostilities broke out in the East. He demonstrated that this British assertion actually depended upon the Royal Navy maintaining a certain standard of naval strength. As late as July 1938, this specified standard was not yet approved. He continued his argument to its powerful conclusion that British assurances regarding the size of the fleet to Singapore had become 'completely invalidated'.²⁵ This 'startling reflection'²⁶ was more so because Italy had not yet entered the defence equation. He continued his analysis up to the present, describing Britain's most recent indications, earlier that month, regarding the fleet and its time of arrival in Singapore as 'inevitably - indefinite'.²⁷ Berendsen expressed no doubt that Britain would dispatch as strong a fleet as possible as quickly as possible to reach Singapore if war with Japan began. However, he felt that the fleet might be of insufficient strength and sent too late.²⁸ The delay before the fleet arrived would be at least 70 days as well as an indefinite period before departure. Japan would, therefore, have supremacy of the seas in the early phase of the war. Sir Arthur Longmore, Britain's delegation leader, admitted in a typically British under-statement that Berendsen's speech 'shattered us somewhat, of course'.²⁹

Much discussion followed Berendsen's speech about the size of the fleet and its date of arrival after hostilities had broken out in the East. It was accepted that the Japanese would have the initiative in the Pacific until the Fleet arrived which was expected to be, all things considered, 90 days after the war in the East had begun.³⁰ Although the prospect of

²⁵ *Verbatim*, p D6.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p E1.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p E3.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p E4.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p F1.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p J3.

Japan's taking Singapore seemed unlikely, Longmore conceded that 'It is not entirely ruled out.'³¹ Nash asked Longmore 'what do we do then to defend Australia and New Zealand when Singapore is gone and the fleet that comes after it is smashed up?' Longmore replied 'take to the Waitomo Caves.' Nash, able to see the funny side in an alarmingly serious situation, responded that the glow-worm caves were 'The only place where we can see anything that is glowing.'³² But the point had been made that Singapore and the Fleet were vital to Australia's and New Zealand's defence. The situation was not made any lighter by uncertainty about what the United States would do. Commodore Horan, New Zealand's Chief of Naval Staff, was particularly pessimistic, saying 'Personally I do not reckon on U.S.A. coming in on our side, no matter what happens.'³³ General Mackesay, representing Britain's War Office, explored the concept that Singapore was impregnable. He said 'The word impregnable means nothing. Nothing is impregnable My point is that although one hopes Singapore is safe - everything possible is done to make it safe - no human being can predict the outcome of a battle'. He continued that 'if Singapore went then New Zealand would be open to the very highest form of invasion.'³⁴

It was a sad irony that at the very moment when the British delegates were busy attempting to persuade their Australian and New Zealand counterparts to continue their adherence to imperial defence, the Admiralty was reassessing the situation in a way that was less than favourable to the southern dominions. Anglo-French talks which began in late March stressed that the Mediterranean was more important than Singapore. Of Britain's ten capital ships, six would be needed in home waters and four in the Mediterranean.³⁵ Any fleet to Singapore would deplete the Mediterranean or home forces. This decision about whether to send a fleet to Singapore was left to be decided later and would depend on the circumstances at the time. The Admiralty's evaluation of the situation in April led it to urge British politicians to withdraw from earlier assurances and to decrease their naval obligations to the Pacific. These developments show that Berendsen's analysis was

³¹ *Ibid.*, p J1.

³² *Ibid.*, p L3.

³³ *Ibid.*, p M3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p 1D1.

³⁵ W.D. McIntyre, *New Zealand prepares for War: defence policy, 1919-1939*, (Christchurch, 1988) p 216-217. (Hereafter referred to as McIntyre, NZPW)

remarkably accurate. However, the British delegates in Wellington were not aware of these developments.

Despite the New Zealand government's concerns about Singapore and the fleet, its commitment to the concept of sending an expeditionary force to Europe still remained strong. This was evident when Nash commented that if the situation in Europe was disastrous 'it does not matter whether we in the Pacific are all right or not'.³⁶ Italy was now considered to be a potential enemy and this should have featured more upon the outcome of this conference. At the conference Britain attempted to reassure the southern dominions that Singapore was a fortress, the fleet would arrive in time and that Japan at present would not move aggressively southwards.

The conference was also an occasion where trans-Tasman co-operation was encouraged and many positive intentions were expressed. Australian and New Zealand naval squadrons were already training together on an annual basis, and now there was to be co-operation in air reconnaissance in the Pacific. Australia agreed to carry out air reconnaissance from New Guinea to the New Hebrides and New Zealand from the New Hebrides to Tonga, which involved establishing air strips at Suva. There was agreement that New Zealand and Australia should fully co-operate in the Tasman Sea with the Naval Board in Melbourne controlling sea lanes there and the New Zealand Naval Board in Wellington controlling the seas east of New Zealand. Measures for improving New Zealand's defence were also discussed at the conference.

Stevens raised concerns that communications across the Tasman were lacking. He said that all he knew about what was happening in Australia was what he read in the newspapers. When planning for defence, he wanted to know what the Australians were doing. 'Nothing comes from Australia to tell us what is the scheme they are proposing to establish.' He believed that this was an important issue that needed addressing. 'Whereas we do get from England the annual and quarterly reports, there is still something lacking that we get nothing of a similar nature from Australia, nor do we reciprocate.'³⁷ Peter Fraser, New Zealand's deputy Prime Minister, said that 'it is rather embarrassing for us to

³⁶ McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 319.

³⁷ *Verbatim* p X2.

read in the cable news, information about what they (Australia) are doing when we have no information about the matter at all'.³⁸ Berendsen supported New Zealand's complaint at the lack of information saying that 'we in New Zealand know less of our what our nearest neighbour [Australia] are doing than what the United Kingdom are doing'.³⁹ He wanted to know what Australia's equivalent of New Zealand's Organisation of National Security was doing, saying that Australia might benefit from information New Zealand could give.

To facilitate trans-Tasman communication Nash suggested that representatives from New Zealand should attend meetings of Australia's Defence Council and that Australian representatives should be at New Zealand defence discussions.⁴⁰ Savage raised the adverse political implications of having a New Zealand representative on the Australian War Council. He said that such a representative 'might hear during an election campaign of certain things they do not want to hear'.⁴¹ Nash picked up this theme saying that if the Australian government was discussing compulsory military training, Australian politicians would not want New Zealand representatives 'eavesdropping' on such a controversial issue, especially if an election were near. It could be politically suicidal. Nevertheless, the New Zealand government and defence planners would be vitally interested in Australia's position on such an important issue. Colvin admitted reluctance in giving information to New Zealand. He said that this was because 'so many things touch on domestic politics and one can understand that even if one is not a politician'.⁴² Savage sympathised with Colvin's position.

In summary, many good intentions were expressed to improve trans-Tasman consultation. However, they were largely empty words, lacking substance. The views of Savage, Nash and Colvin demonstrated clearly that domestic politics were a higher priority than consultation across that Tasman. Trans-Tasman communication was directed by politics within Australia and New Zealand. This was a situation that suited politicians in Canberra and Wellington.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p X3.

³⁹ *Ibid*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p X1.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p X6.

⁴² *Ibid*, p Y1.

The theme of imperial defence continued to persist in Australia and New Zealand, although its weaknesses had been exposed. David Day suggests that for Australia to doubt Britain's ability to hold Singapore was to doubt the strength of the Royal Navy that held together the Empire-Commonwealth. This was an uncomfortable thought for defence planners and foreign policy advisers. Accepting the declining power of the Empire-Commonwealth had unwelcome political implications. It meant that Australia would have to spend vast amounts of money upon defence. This expense would possibly have involved increased taxes which would have been unpopular, especially following the recent political instability after Lyon's death. On a more positive note, Day mentions that the British, French and the Dutch had colonial possessions in the Pacific. Their combined navies together with the United States Fleet at Pearl Harbor would provide a deterrent to the Japanese. This theory rested upon the assumption that Britain, France and the Netherlands would have navies available to serve in the Pacific as well as in the Mediterranean. It also assumed the willingness of the United States to become involved in hostilities or deterring the Japanese. This was by no means a certainty. The strongest element in Australia's and New Zealand's defence was their distance from Japan which would necessitate long supply and communication lines if they were invaded. Australia was also a vast country that would require a substantial invading force to occupy.

In his first broadcast speech as Australian Prime Minister on 26 April 1939, Robert Menzies associated Australia with New Zealand in the Pacific. He asserted that Australia's place was in the Pacific; and declared that it could not rely on the Royal Navy without taking action itself. As part of this, Australia needed to consult with other dominions, especially New Zealand. He said on 26 April 1939 'We must have full consultation and co-operation with Great Britain, South Africa, New Zealand and Canada. But all those consultations must be on the basis that the primary risk in the Pacific is borne by New Zealand and ourselves'.⁴³ This comment was particularly surprising coming from Menzies who had earned the reputation as a staunch loyalist to the Empire-Commonwealth. Yet in his first public broadcast he advocated acting independently of Britain and forming closer trans-Tasman relations. This shows that Menzies was not a blind loyalist but wanted to act in Australia's best interests. Menzies was receptive to closer trans-Tasman co-operation

⁴³ Broadcast Speech by Menzies, *DAFP II*, Doc 73.

when he felt that Australia was faced with an unwelcome external influence such as the threat of war.

Chapter 3

Independently following similar policies: Australia and New Zealand, September 1939- December 1941

There were striking similarities between the policies of Australia and New Zealand, in their attitudes, actions and reactions to the war in Europe. The Australian and New Zealand governments had watched with concern as the situation in Europe in the late 1930s grew increasingly perilous. Events in Europe suggested that war was close at hand. The Germans had moved into the Rhineland in 1936 and annexed Austria in 1938. They marched into Prague on 15 March 1939 and effectively destroyed the facade of the Munich agreement. Britain and France extended a guarantee to Poland on 31 March that would secure its independence from a hostile Germany. The Australian government was informed on 24 August that the British Prime Minister had two days earlier sent a letter to the German Chancellor informing him that Britain fully intended to honour its guarantee to Poland. Consequently, when German troops then crossed into Polish territory the Australian government realised that war was likely and at about 3.00 a.m. on 2 September Menzies broadcast on radio that Australia was on 'the very brink of war'.¹

Australian and New Zealand politicians listened intently to Neville Chamberlain's solemn broadcast on 3 September announcing that Britain (not the Empire-Commonwealth) was at war with Germany. However, poor atmospheric conditions and the resulting static in Wellington caused considerable uncertainty there about the message's meaning. Political authorities in Wellington had not heard Chamberlain clearly and did not know whether Britain was at war.² The Tasman neighbours had expected official telegrams that would confirm the authenticity of Chamberlain's broadcast. None arrived, but telegrams were received at the Navy Office in both countries and these were taken as confirmation.

Menzies, leading a minority coalition government (United Australia Party and United Country Party), without parliamentary debate or consulting his cabinet, responded

¹ Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 1, p 151.

² John Henderson *Interview with Berendsen*.

positively to Chamberlain's broadcast little over an hour later. At 9.15 p.m. (Australian time) he announced to the nation 'It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that, in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain had declared war upon her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war'.³ Australia's response to Chamberlain's declaration was prompt as a symbol of loyalty to Britain. From his statement, Menzies indicated that Australia had no option than to go to war. Hasluck ^f commented that Australia went to war for three reasons: because of its membership ^{to the} ~~the~~ Empire-Commonwealth, because if Britain were overrun Australia might suffer the same fate at the hands of Germany or Japan and finally because of Australia's views upon international morality.⁴ Menzies cabled Chamberlain and informed him that his seemingly uninspiring broadcast had 'moved Australia deeply'.⁵

New Zealand's response to Chamberlain ~~and~~ was also prompt. Savage was ill, so ~~Fraser~~ ^{his} deputy, unlike Menzies, consulted the Cabinet and shortly before midnight (New Zealand time) the New Zealand government decided to declare war on Germany.⁶ At 1.55 a.m. (4 September) the New Zealand government despatched a cable to Britain declaring its support and intention to participate in the war. It read 'His Majesty's Government in New Zealand desires immediately to associate themselves with His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom in honouring their pledged word'.⁷ This 'pledged word' was Britain's guarantee of Poland's neutrality from German aggression. These remarkably similar responses were the result of both countries' governments independently sharing similar assumptions about imperial defence. Both were members of the League of Nations and were strongly opposed to countries with powerful military forces overrunning countries with less powerful armed forces. As members of the Empire-Commonwealth, the Australian and New Zealand governments were inclined to follow Britain in external Affairs. It was almost inconceivable that Britain could be at war whilst the Tasman neighbours remained passive.

³ Menzies to Chamberlain, 4 September 1939, *DAFP II*, Doc 192.

⁴ Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 1, p 156.

⁵ Menzies to Chamberlain, 4 September 1939, *DAFP II*, Doc 192.

⁶ *Henderson Interview with Stevens*, p 10.

⁷ Galway to Eden, 4 September 1939, *Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-1945*, vol I, (Wellington, 1949) Doc 9. (Hereafter referred to as Documents 1)

Although contact between Australia and New Zealand was minimal, relations were favourable on the outbreak of war in Europe. The British had encouraged the exchange of High Commissioners between Australia and Canada and ^{agreement?} was supportive of strengthening relations between all the dominions. The Australian Cabinet agreed on 5 September 1939 to exchange High Commissioners with Canada, who made the request two days earlier. Menzies then wanted to follow suit with New Zealand. The Australian Cabinet 'resolved that negotiations should be opened with ... the Prime Minister of New Zealand for the reciprocal exchange of High Commissioners'.⁸ Despite good intentions, these negotiations did not eventuate at the time. High Commissioners were not exchanged between Australia and New Zealand until 1943.

An indication of the low level of trans-Tasman contact was reflected in the trading relations between the two countries. The below tables illustrate that trade across the Tasman was limited while trade with Britain was heavy.

TABLE I⁹*New Zealand's Exports by percentage*

	1938	1939	1940	1941
Australia	3.77	3.91	2.95	3.57
Britain	84.17	80.99	87.60	78.15

TABLE II¹⁰*Australia's Exports by percentage*

	1938-1939	1939-1940	1940-1941	1941-1942
New Zealand	5.45	4.35	5.70	4.29
Britain	54.45	64.10	42.64	27.07

The low level of trade across the Tasman is immediately apparent in these tables.

⁸ Cabinet Minute 181, 5 September 1939, *DAFP II*, Doc 198.

⁹ Figures from *The Official New Zealand Year-Book 1945*, p 695.

¹⁰ Figures from *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia No. 36 - 1944-1945*, p 348.

The Australian and New Zealand governments feared that Japan might take advantage of the war in Europe to further its ends in Asia and the Pacific. They were apprehensive because Japan had a recently proven record of military opportunism in China. The Tasman neighbours were greatly relieved when the Japanese Government said on 3 September that it wished 'to devote its energies to settling the China incident'.¹¹ The British government told the southern dominions that they need not be concerned about Japanese aggression towards them which was, it claimed, an extremely unlikely eventuality. Many British politicians had deluded themselves into believing that imperial strategy would allow them to switch priorities easily between the Middle East and the Far East, without any serious or immediate consequences upon its defence. Many British ministers sincerely believed that Singapore was impregnable and that consequently the southern dominions had no need to be concerned about Japan. The Admiralty believed that it would be free to send naval forces to the Far East because Japan was occupied in China, the United States was taking a tougher attitude towards Japan and Italy remained neutral.

New Zealand's Organisation for National Security (ONS) acted according to the relevant regulations in the recently finished *War Book* on 4 September. The ONS was modelled on the British Committee of Imperial Defence. It consisted of committees of politicians, servicemen and civil servants with Stevens as the co-ordinating secretary. It was under civilian control. The findings of these committees formed the substance of the *War Book*. The purpose of the *War Book* was to ensure a smooth transition from peace to war.¹²

Savage announced New Zealand's support for the war the following day. 'Both with gratitude for the past, and with confidence in the future, we range ourselves without fear beside Britain. Where she goes, we go, where she stands, we stand.'¹³ The next logical step for the New Zealand government was to decide whether or not to send an expeditionary force overseas, as had been done in the Boer War and the Great War. This decision was relatively straightforward. The New Zealand government had been assured by the British government that the Japanese armed forces were not a threat. As early as 5

¹¹ Lissington, *NZ & Japan*, p 138.

¹² *Henderson Interview with Stevens*.

¹³ Wood, *NZPW*, p 11. (Hereafter referred to as Wood, *NZPW*)

September, the New Zealand Council of Defence recommended that a 'special force' be raised. Although it did not mention that it would serve overseas, this was the assumption behind the force. This advice was accepted by the government which made the announcement on 8 September. Recruitment for the force of 6 600 began on 12 September and within a week 12 000 had volunteered.¹⁴ New Zealand formally made the offer on 13 September to send an expeditionary force of one trained division overseas. However, this offer was conditional upon the attitude of Japan and on Britain's willingness to supply weapons, shipping and protection for the convoy.

The decision to send an expeditionary force overseas was more complex in Australia than it was in New Zealand. The Opposition in Australia demanded to have a say in the extent of involvement that the country would have in the war. On 5 September when New Zealand politicians were being advised by the Chiefs of Staff to raise forces, Menzies was uncertain of Australia's position. He told Bruce in London that until he was certain of Japan's position it would be 'useless even to discuss the sending of [an] expeditionary force'.¹⁵ Richard Casey, the Minister for Supply and Development, went to London to meet with dominion leaders. He wanted an assurance from Britain that Japan would not be a threat to Australia.¹⁶ Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, was happy to give a verbal commitment, believing that a war in the Pacific would not occur simultaneously with a war in Europe. The rest of the British Cabinet preferred to give vague replies to Casey. Consequently, British attempts to assure Australia of Japan's neutrality did not put Menzies' fears to rest. It was only after press pressure from across the Tasman that a reluctant Menzies on 15 September (2 days after New Zealand's offer) offered an expeditionary force. This was to serve either at home or overseas depending on the circumstances at the time.

The Australian government in the first few months of the war was more concerned with local defence than with imperial defence. The Labor Party, which remained in opposition until October 1941, was traditionally opposed to sending expeditionary forces overseas and to conscription. Its opposition to sending expeditionary forces overseas was

¹⁴ Wood, *NZPW*, p 98.

¹⁵ Horner, *High Command*, p 23.

¹⁶ Day, *Great Betrayal*, p 24.

primarily because it did not agree with participating in 'imperial' wars overseas as this was betraying its 'working class' ideals. Also, it cost the government money and while the forces were away the defences of Australia were greatly depleted. The Labor Party opposed compulsory military training as the government failed to use all the volunteers and paid the men too little.¹⁷ In response to this, Menzies announced on 27 October 1939 that there 'will be no conscription for service outside Australia and its territories as far as my Government is concerned'.¹⁸ At the same time the Australian Cabinet introduced conscription for home defence. This was partly because many had left the Militia to join the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) because it served overseas. The Labor Party's opposition to expeditionary forces serving overseas mellowed when its members conceded that it was what most Australians wanted.¹⁹

Australia and New Zealand contributed to the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) for training pilots in Canada to fight in the Royal Air Force in Europe. The Australian government agreed to recruit 57 473 men over the next three years to train in this scheme.²⁰ This decision was announced in February 1940. The first draft of Australian EATS trainees left Sydney for Vancouver on 5 September 1940. The New Zealand government agreed to recruit 1 000 men a year to be trained through this scheme to serve in the RAF. The extent of New Zealand's involvement was seen when more 'Kiwi' pilots died in the Battle of Britain than any others except British and Poles.

The main defence problem was that Australia and New Zealand, both Island nations, were ignorant of each others' naval relations with Britain on the outbreak of war. The New Zealand Navy had agreed that its ships would not automatically pass into the hands of the Admiralty when war began. However, on 2 September 1939, it learnt that Australian naval forces had been placed at the disposal of the British Admiralty. The New Zealand Navy wrongly concluded from this that the Admiralty had full control of Australian vessels. In fact, the Australian position was that vessels would revert to Admiralty control on the condition that they would not leave Australian waters without prior consultation.²¹ The

¹⁷ Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 1, p 166.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p 167.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 166.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p 166-167.

²¹ McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 344.

New Zealand Navy, after jumping to the wrong conclusion, felt out of step with its Australian counterparts, and on 7 September it offered the Admiralty full control over its two vessels. This offer was accepted two days later. New Zealand's defence was dependent upon naval forces, yet the government and Chiefs of Staff were ignorant of Australia's naval position. Despite the information shared at the Pacific Defence Conference, there remained a significant amount of ignorance about each other.

The limited nature of the consultation that existed between the Australian and New Zealand governments was again demonstrated in November 1939 by an ignorance of each others' intentions about sending expeditionary forces to Europe. The Australian government was reluctant to contemplate sending forces overseas until it was certain that Japan was not a threat. Casey argued that a Japanese invasion of the Netherlands East Indies would put Japanese forces on Australia's doorstep. The British government was unable to give the Australian government a definite assurance about the Netherlands East Indies until the position of the United States was known. Britain was unsure of the United States position for some time to come. Cordell Hull, the United States Secretary of State, remembered a cable he received on 22 March 1940 from Kennedy. Kennedy said that Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, 'said that Britain had promised Australia to send a fleet to Singapore, but now felt unable to spare a fleet from European waters and wondered whether we would consider transferring the fleet back to the Pacific at the psychological moment.'²²

In the meantime Menzies by delaying ^{his} its decision about sending an expeditionary force to Europe, had secured British agreement to buy wheat.²³ This was particularly satisfactory to the Country Party. On 13 November Australia's Chiefs of Staff (on the advice of Casey in London) had recommended that the 6th division go to Egypt or Palestine and another division be raised. Menzies was not convinced and wanted an up to date British appreciation. This was because on the same day, the British government had told the Australian and New Zealand governments that the Pacific was safe, yet Britain and France had removed all their soldiers from North China as Japan had demanded. Menzies sent a cable to the New Zealand Prime Minister on 21 November outlining his government's

²² *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol 1, p 630.

²³ Day, *Great Betrayal*, p 29.

views about sending an expeditionary force overseas. Menzies said that although the Admiralty and Foreign Office had made assurances about the strength of Singapore, he was still concerned that Germany might invade Holland, creating a power vacuum in the Netherlands East Indies. He also noted the lack of urgency in the European war theatre, and said that while Britain struggled to find shipping and protection for Australian exports to Britain it could apparently find shipping and protection for Australian soldiers to Europe. Menzies finished by saying that Australia wished to 'watch developments of next three or four weeks before committing ourselves to dispatch of our division overseas.' He continued that 'At the same time we do not wish to be out of step with you as we think that from every point of view the closest co-ordination between our policies is essential'.²⁴

However, on the previous day the New Zealand government had informed the British government that it would dispatch the first echelon of its expeditionary force overseas. Consequently, on 22 November Savage had to inform Menzies of New Zealand's decision that inevitably put Australia 'out of step'. Savage explained that this decision was made on the advice of Fraser, New Zealand's representative at the ministerial meeting in London where Casey, Australia's representative, was present. Savage continued that New Zealand's problems were different from Australia's. Because of limited facilities, New Zealand could train only one echelon at a time and the present echelon had to be sent overseas before another could be trained. Also, New Zealand's voluntary system of recruitment was based on the acceptance that the men would serve overseas. Savage said that the most important reason why he had overlooked informing Menzies was that 'I had assumed that the matter was one of common arrangement with our Ministers in London.'²⁵ Savage thought that the Australian government was already aware of the situation because Casey knew. Menzies cabled Savage on 28 November to express his disappointment at New Zealand's failure to consult or even inform the Australian government of this decision. Menzies referred to Savage's cable on 23 September 1938 in which the New Zealand Prime Minister had stated: 'I suggest for your consideration that we establish the principle of complete mutual interchange of information between Governments as opposed to between

²⁴ Menzies to Savage, 21 November 1939, *DNZER I*, Doc 4.

²⁵ Savage to Menzies, 22 November 1939, *Ibid*, Doc 5.

individual services'.²⁶ This incident demonstrates Australia's and New Zealand's lack of communication.

Nash believed that New Zealand's decision had embarrassed the Australian government politically. He received unofficial information that Menzies believed that he should have been consulted before the decision was taken. This was because John Curtin, Leader of the Opposition, had publicly stated on the previous day that he opposed despatching troops overseas. Menzies, faced with this opposition, felt that his hand was forced by New Zealand's decision.²⁷ Fraser was surprised at the reaction of the Australian government to New Zealand's decision. He explained his bewilderment in clear terms. 'Negotiations for the dispatch of the Australian forces have been proceeding here simultaneously with those for the dispatch of the New Zealand forces, and indeed ... I stated on 16 November at a meeting with War Cabinet, in the presence of Casey, our intention to dispatch the force.'²⁸ Furthermore, Fraser said that Casey 'left no doubt as to the intention of Australia to dispatch the force' when naval protection of both countries' forces was discussed. Yet Menzies was still angry at New Zealand's decision. He felt that he was faced with pressure that he would find hard to resist and that he had to follow New Zealand.²⁹ Finally, on 28 November the Australian Cabinet approved the dispatch of the 6th division to the Middle East. It sailed for the Middle East on 10 January 1940.

The Australian and New Zealand governments were concerned about the situation in the Pacific. They wanted the United States to play a more active role in deterring any Japanese military expansion in the Pacific. Both countries wanted the United States to throw off its isolationist policy and to embrace the role of defending them from Japan. However, their assessments of United States attitudes had been ambiguous. They were not sure what the official United States' line towards them was and at times may even have doubted that one existed. At the meeting of the visiting dominion ministers in November 1939, Lord Lothian, the British Ambassador in Washington, said that there was not 'any particularly strong feeling ... for Australia or New Zealand, though they were popular as

²⁶ *Ibid*, Doc 1.

²⁷ Nash to Fraser, 29 November 1939, *Documents 1*, Doc 59.

²⁸ Fraser to Savage, 30 November 1939, *Ibid*, Doc 61.

²⁹ Horner, *High Command*, p 29-30.

young democracies'.³⁰ He continued on a rather encouraging note. The Pacific had increasingly become to be seen by the United States as an American pond. Consequently, it would regard any Japanese expansion into this territory as decidedly undesirable. If Australia or New Zealand were threatened by Japanese aggression the United States would soon be at war with Japan. Australia particularly, wanted closer relations with the United States. Keith Officer became Australia's first Counsellor to Washington in May 1937. He worked with Lothian, essentially supporting Britain's views. Justice Herbert Vere Evatt of the Australian High Court was not impressed by Officer's position in Washington. He said that it 'galled him to find Canada, Ireland and South Africa well set-up and playing a role here, and then to find Australia's representative in a cubby-hole at the end of the long corridor in the British Embassy.'³¹ Despite this, the Australian government was a step ahead of the New Zealand government which did not at this stage have any diplomatic representation in the United States.

In New Zealand the distractions of party politics continued well after the outbreak of war. From October 1939 Savage was so ill that many of his speeches and broadcasts were more the views of Fraser, his deputy, than his own.³² It was John A. Lee, who rocked the boat. He published an article called 'Psycho-Pathology in Politics' on 6 December 1939³³ strongly suggesting that the time had come for Savage to resign. He wrote 'An odd old? politician becomes physically, becomes mentally sick, and while he is physically and mentally sick sycophants pour flattery upon him.' Although he was careful not to mention Savage's name it was obvious that the article was directed at him. He continued that 'There is no instance yet recorded in history of a party winning a people by carrying a leader in a sick bed in front, by asking to-morrow to grow reverent at the odour of iodine.' This article caused much outrage. The climax was reached when Lee was expelled from the party on 25 March 1940. Savage died two days later on 27 March and was mourned throughout the country. Fraser succeeded him as Prime Minister. However, even as late as May 1940 war in Europe seemed distant to most New Zealanders.

³⁰ Wood, *NZPW*, p 193.

³¹ P.G. Edwards, *Prime Ministers and diplomats: the making of Australian Foreign Policy, 1901-1949*, (Melbourne, 1983) p 118.

³² Wood, *NZPW*, p 121.

³³ J.A. Lee, 'Psycho-Pathology in Politics', *Tomorrow*, 6 December 1939.

The Australian and New Zealand governments were concerned for the safety of their troops, which were about to leave Australia and New Zealand for Palestine and Egypt. Australasian troops would be at considerable risk if Italy entered the war when the troops were passing through the Red Sea or the Mediterranean. This was a likely scenario in late April and early May 1940. Anthony Eden, Britain's Dominions Secretary, suggested the diversion of both countries' forces to Britain.³⁴ The Australian government replied that it could not decide until it had received a British Chiefs of Staff appreciation and meanwhile asked that the convoy be held in Colombo.³⁵ The New Zealand government's memory of the Australian government's reaction to its decision regarding the first echelon was still fresh in the minds of the politicians. Fraser told Eden of the 'embarrassment which would result were Australia to take one course and New Zealand another'³⁶ and asked Britain for immediate advice about diverting its forces. However, military experts in both countries preferred that the soldiers continue on their planned route to Palestine and Egypt, rather than splitting the divisions by diverting the men to Britain. Australia's War Cabinet was divided on the issue and reluctant to divide its forces and even suggested training in Northwest India. Britain informed the Australian government that this was not practical as it was too hot, there was no accommodation and no equipment. The situation became more perilous and it was decided that it was safer to divert the convoys to Britain. Australia's third convoy of its 6th division and New Zealand's second echelon of its 2nd division went to Britain.

The seriousness of the war was beginning to be felt in New Zealand. Fraser responded by broadcasting to the people on 26 May 1940 the Government's decision to introduce conscription. He also announced the decision to form a War Cabinet with Ministers, Members of the Opposition and representatives from industry, trade and farmers. In the end this proved to be too large and on 16 July he announced the War Cabinet consisting of J.G. Coates, who was the Prime Minister from 1925-1928, Adam Hamilton, Leader of the Opposition, Frederick Jones, the Minister of Defence, Nash and himself. The war took on a more local and threatening flavour when the German cruiser *Orion* laid 228 mines across the approaches to Auckland harbour on 13-14 June. Less than a week later

³⁴ Eden to Galway, 30 April 1940, *Documents I*, Doc 123.

³⁵ Menzies to Fraser, 1 May 1940, *Ibid*, Doc 126.

³⁶ Galway to Eden, 2 May 1940, *Ibid*, Doc 128.

the trans-Tasman steamer *Niagara* struck one and was sunk with £2, 1/2 million worth of gold bullion plus half a million New Zealand small arms which were on their way to Britain.³⁷ The government and Chiefs of Staff were concerned that New Zealand was threatened with coastal attack and did not have any reconnaissance planes. The British government was not sympathetic with New Zealand's position when the Battle of Britain began on 10 July 1940. Britain was fighting for its survival.

The fall of France³⁸ upset the naval balance of power in Europe. The French navy was lost and Britain was faced with the prospect of fighting the Italian and German navies. This forced Britain to reassess the situation. Consequently, the Australian and New Zealand governments received a telegram from the British on 13 June 1940, which gave a general survey of the strategic situation and the implications for Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific.

In the unlikely event of Japan, inspite of the restraining influence of the United States of America, taking the opportunity to alter the *status quo* in the Far East we should be faced with a naval situation in which, without the assistance of France, we should not have sufficient forces to meet the combined German and Italian navies in European waters and the Japanese fleet in the Far East. In the circumstances envisaged it is most improbable that we could send adequate reinforcements to the Far East.³⁹

Fraser cabled Churchill, now the British Prime Minister, on 15 June. He expressed his disillusionment that New Zealand's defence policy was based upon a British assurance that had been withdrawn at the last possible moment. He claimed that this British pledge had been 'reinforced by repeated and most explicit assurances, that a strong British fleet would be available to, and would, proceed to Singapore should the circumstances so require even if this involved the abandonment of British interests in the Mediterranean'⁴⁰. Despite his reservations he said that his government 'do not in any way demur to this decision (which they have always regarded as a possibility) if, as they assume, it is necessary in order to safeguard the position in the central and critical theatre of war, and they are quite prepared to accept the risks which they recognise are inevitable if the most effective use is to be made of Commonwealth naval forces.'⁴¹ While accepting Britain's decision, Fraser made it clear

³⁷ McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 346.

³⁸ France surrendered on 17 June 1940.

³⁹ Wood, *NZPW*, p 194.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Galway to Caldecote, 15 June 1940, *Documents III*, Doc 184.

that New Zealand's defence policy was based upon the Fleet's arriving in Singapore. This telegram by Fraser to Churchill has been referred to as the single most important document in the formation of New Zealand's foreign policy.⁴² It is difficult to understand why Wood believes this when Fraser says that his government 'do not in any way demur' to Britain. New Zealand's foreign policy at this stage was still within the framework of the Empire-Commonwealth and this telegram did not represent any significant departure.

McGibbon notes that the fall of France caused three things; an upset in the naval balance in Europe, the 13 June telegram to the dominions from Britain, and a power vacuum in French Indo-China which Japan exploited the following year. The New Zealand government's response was Fraser's telegram on 15 June, the decision to send a Cabinet Minister to Washington, a desire to improve the defences of Fiji and hesitation before it agreed to send the third echelon of the Expeditionary Force.⁴³ On 5 June 1940 the New Zealand government had decided to send a brigade group to Fiji and the men were sent in October. Two squadrons of the RNZAF were based in Fiji.

The Australian government's response was more subdued than that of the New Zealand government. Menzies, unlike Fraser, does not seem to have responded to this telegram. The Australian government had anticipated this development and its implications earlier than the New Zealand government had. Earlier, on 25 May Bruce met A.V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, to discuss the position of Australia if France fell. Obviously Australia was already considering this possibility. Australia's War Cabinet met on the day before the 13 June British statement. As if anticipating the British telegram that would arrive the following day, the question was asked 'whether or not we should continue to rely on the pre-war undertaking that a British squadron of capital ships would proceed to Singapore immediately on hostile action in the Pacific'.⁴⁴ The Australian government responded to the fall of France by requesting a British appreciation in the light of the new situation. This arrived on 28 June.⁴⁵ Churchill said that in the new situation the significance of Malaya was vital and asked Australia to move one division there as soon as possible.

⁴² Wood, *NZPW*, p 194.

⁴³ McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 357-359.

⁴⁴ Horner, *High Command*, p 35.

⁴⁵ Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 1, p 222.

Later on 20 June the British government told Australia that there was 'no hope of being able to dispatch a fleet to Singapore'.⁴⁶

The Australian government had made diplomatic moves towards the United States. In March 1940 Casey was appointed as Australia's first Minister to the United States. As early as September 1939, Menzies had offered Bruce the post of Australian Minister to the United States. If Bruce had accepted, Menzies would have sent Casey to replace him as High Commissioner in London. Bruce modestly replied that he was the best man for the job either in London or Washington but that he preferred to stay in London while Casey should go to Washington. He even got Chamberlain, Maurice Hankey and Montagu Norman to support his staying in London. Bruce, however did agree to move to Washington temporarily to establish a legation there, intending to return to London afterwards. At this point Eden intervened, telling Menzies that he was deeply concerned that Bruce may be absent from London even for a short time.⁴⁷ Consequently, on 6 March 1940 Casey became the head of the Australian legation to Washington and presented his credentials to Roosevelt. Another reason why he was sent was because he was regarded by Menzies as a political threat to his leadership. Menzies' leanings towards the United States did not end with the establishment of a legation in Washington. He made three personal appeals to Roosevelt in May and June 1940 to help the British Commonwealth.⁴⁸

New Zealand's diplomatic moves towards the United States were partly in response to Churchill's suggestion in June that the United States could provide some security in the Pacific. The New Zealand government asked the British government for approval of the dispatch of a New Zealand Cabinet Minister to Washington. Churchill replied that the timing was not appropriate. Fraser responded that the situation in the Pacific was urgent and that it wished to follow the Australian government towards the United States.⁴⁹ On 23 December 1940 the United States government agreed to New Zealand's dispatching a diplomat to Washington. Yet it was not until November 1941 that this position was filled. This delay of eleven months was caused by Peter Fraser's inability to decide who to send.

⁴⁶ Horner, *High Command*, p 36.

⁴⁷ Edwards, *PMs and diplomats*, p 121.

⁴⁸ Horner, *High Command*, p 35.

⁴⁹ Wood, *NZPW*, p 195.

In the interim it was agreed in May 1941 to send Coates to discuss the supply of munitions and Frank Langstone, the Minister of Lands, External Affairs and Native Islands, to negotiate the sale of dairy produce and meat and to make the necessary preliminary arrangements for establishing a legation. Coates later returned, urging that a diplomat be sent.⁵⁰ Fraser struggled between choosing someone who could not be spared from Wellington and someone ^{who} ~~was~~ would be inadequate in a crisis. He chose the former, Nash. This decision was made easier for Fraser as Nash had made a bid for the leadership of the party. Fraser, who did not welcome such a challenge to his leadership, welcomed the opportunity of sending Nash to Washington instead. However, it was not until 18 November 1941 that Nash was appointed to this position. Both Nash and Casey were posted to Washington, in part, because they were felt to be a challenge to their countries' leaderships. X

The Japanese government realised that Britain's resources were strained in Europe after France and the Netherlands fell and Italy entered the war, and that the time was right to exploit this in the Far East. On 24 June 1940 the Japanese Foreign Office told Sir Robert Craigie, Britain's Ambassador in Tokyo, that it demanded that Britain close the Burma Road, close the Hong Kong frontier and withdraw its garrison from Shanghai. The Japanese government's concern was that it was at war against China and that supplies were reaching China through the Burma Road. However, the Burma Road issue was a moral one, as only a trickle of trade passed this way into China. Britain was conscious that the United States was strongly pro-Chinese in this war. Still, Craigie was concerned not to drag the United States into a war with Japan at the expense of it losing interest in the war in Europe. The British government preferred a Chinese-Japanese settlement and was embarrassed by the Japanese demands. However, the British government realised that it would not have the support of the United States if a refusal of Japanese demands led to war and agreed on a compromise. The Burma Road was closed on 18 July, for three months and during this time Japan was to find a solution to the Sino-Japanese war. Although Britain actually conceded little, this episode was seen as a grave loss of face. Closing the Burma Road was supposed to lead to negotiation, but Japan spent these three months

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p 195-196.

infiltrating into Indo-China and pressuring the Netherlands East Indies for economic concessions.

The New Zealand government was firmly opposed to the closure of the Burma Road. It was opposed to appeasement and was reluctant to be associated with the British over this issue. Fraser told Eden on 30 July 1940 that 'while we neither understand nor sympathise with the policy that has been adopted vis-a-vis Japan we are nevertheless unwilling to add unnecessarily to the difficulties' of the British government.⁵¹ Fraser was also annoyed that New Zealand was not kept informed of events. However, despite Fraser's strong feelings over the issue, the New Zealand government accepted Britain's decision deferentially.

In contrast, the Australian government had urged Britain to close the Burma Road. The Australian government did not have a consistent policy towards Japan for some time. Initially, Australia favoured a policy of appeasement, being willing to give economic concessions and accepting Japan's guarantees not to attack French, British and United States colonies in the Pacific. From January 1940 Australia had been considering appointing an Australian Minister to Tokyo. The War Cabinet felt, on 14 June, that this should be done without delay before the situation got any worse. Consequently, Sir John Latham was appointed to this position on 18 August. However, he did not arrive for another four months. This appointment and Australia's willingness to concede to Japan over the Burma Road were attempts to maintain peace with Japan. However, its attitude hardened in August and Menzies said that that his Government is 'completely hostile to the mere appeasement of Japan'.⁵² The Australian government was also conscious that Britain should avoid war with Japan whilst it was involved in war in Europe. Yet, by October 1940 Menzies was assuring Churchill that if Britain found itself at war with Japan, without the help of the United States, Australia would declare war on Japan.

Australia's and New Zealand's diplomatic relations and probes towards the United States were encouraged by British evaluations of the situation. The British Chiefs of Staff prepared a new Far East Appreciation on 31 July 1940, the first since June 1937. This

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p 198.

⁵² Bell, *Unequal Allies*, p 17.

review had rested upon two assumptions: firstly that any threat to British interests would be from the sea, and secondly that the Royal Navy could send a fleet to provide protection within three months of any given incident. However, Japanese advances into Southern China and Hainan, combined with the acquisition of aerodromes in Thailand, meant that Japan could provide a land and air threat as well as a naval threat. Britain did not have the resources and ability to send a fleet to Eastern waters whilst facing German and Italian navies in the Mediterranean. Consequently, the two assumptions upon which the June 1937 Far East Appreciation was based were now invalid. The new appreciation was based on the assumption that Japan's aims were to free itself and the Far East from Western influence and to secure raw materials. To do this, Japan had to capture the Singapore base. The likelihood of Japanese expansion southwards depended upon five factors: (1) military and economic commitment to China, (2) economic consequences of war against Britain and the United States, (3) the threat of Russia, (4) the fear of United States military action, and (5) the possibility of an Axis victory in Europe, that would enable Japan to take what it wanted in Asia and the Pacific without any repercussions from the Allies. The situation in Europe meant that Britain had to avoid or at least delay war with Japan. Ideally, a comprehensive Far East settlement would be reached that would be acceptable to both Japan and Britain.

The basic defence problem in the Far East was that Britain had no Eastern Fleet. The Appreciation was clear about this. 'In the absence of a Fleet, we cannot prevent damage to our interests in the Far East. Our object must, therefore, be to limit the extent of the damage and in the last resort to retain a footing from which we could eventually retrieve the position when stronger forces become available.'⁵³ Although it was possible that Japan could attack British possessions,⁵⁴ the Netherlands East Indies or the Philippines it was more likely that it would first attack Indo-China or Thailand. A Japanese invasion of Australia or New Zealand was seen as unlikely as long as the Singapore base remained in British hands and the United States Fleet remained intact. The scale of attack on Australia and New Zealand was likely to be cruiser raids, perhaps with light air attacks on ports.⁵⁵ Trade routes across the Tasman and the trans-Pacific route could be threatened. Both

⁵³ *British Chiefs of Staff Far East Appreciation*, 31 July 1940, p 4.

⁵⁴ British possessions in the Far East that could be potential targets included Malaya, Singapore, the garrison in north China and Hong Kong.

⁵⁵ *UK COS Far East Appreciation*, 31 July 1940, p 16, paragraph 44-45.

Australia and New Zealand were dependent upon trade for economic survival, and evasive routing was the only option available to meet this threat. It was possible that Japan could establish advanced fuel bases in the southern seas that would threaten the Southwest Pacific area.⁵⁶

Aware of their weakness in the Far East, the British Chiefs of Staff felt that the most important objective was the defence of Malaya and denying the Netherlands East Indies to the Japanese. However, Dutch co-operation was not a certainty and Britain was unsure whether it would be able to stop Japan attacking the Netherlands East Indies. Britain's decision about what action to take if Japan attacked the Netherlands East Indies depended on whether the Dutch resisted and if they did to what extent.⁵⁷ The assessment was that at present 'it would not be possible to offer the Dutch any effective military support in the event of Japanese aggression.'⁵⁸ For this reason, immediate talks with the Dutch were not recommended, but they would be important in the future.

The British government was clearly unable to send any material or military aid to Australia and New Zealand in the Pacific, so instead sent Far Eastern Appreciations. The British Chiefs of Staff sent an appreciation to Fraser and Menzies on 11 August 1940. In the foreword to this assessment was a message from Churchill that outlined Britain's desire to avoid war with Japan. Churchill promised that if Australia or New Zealand were invaded Britain would leave the Mediterranean to 'proceed in good time with a fleet able to give battle to any Japanese Force'.⁵⁹ In the worst possible scenario, Churchill promised that Britain would not desert Australia or New Zealand.

If however contrary to prudence and self-interest, Japan set about invading Australian and New Zealand on a large scale, I have the explicit authority of the Cabinet to assure you that we should then cut our losses in the Mediterranean and proceed to your aid sacrificing every interest except only the defence and feeding of this Island on which all depends.⁶⁰

Churchill, however, was gambling that his promise would never be put to the test, because he did not have any intention of sending a fleet to Australia or New Zealand. He said that at

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p 15, paragraph 43.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p 17-18, paragraph 52-60.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p 18, paragraph 58.

⁵⁹ J. Robertson, *Australia at War 1939-1945*, (Melbourne, 1981) p 60-61.

⁶⁰ Churchill to Menzies and Fraser, 11 August 1940, *Cab 65/14*.

any time the Eastern Mediterranean Fleet could pass through the Suez Canal to Singapore. Yet such a transfer of naval forces 'would entail the complete loss of the Middle East and all prospect of beating Italy in the Mediterranean would be gone.'⁶¹ It seems extremely unlikely that that Churchill would have been willing to save the Far East at the cost of losing the Middle East, if he was faced with this choice. On 13 May 1941 Churchill wrote to General John Greer Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, about the importance of Singapore in relation to the Middle East. 'I gather you would be prepared to face the loss of Egypt and the Nile Valley, together with the surrender or ruin of the Army of half a million we have concentrated there, rather than lose Singapore. I do not take that view'.⁶²

The Australian and New Zealand governments were not convinced by Churchill's statement that Britain could defend them. Both Australia and New Zealand received the British statement of 11 August as mere rhetoric. Far from reassuring the Australian government, it motivated them to look closely at their defence and the relative importance of Singapore and the Middle East. The Chiefs of Staff considered that if Japan had possession of the Netherlands East Indies and Singapore was either reduced or in its hands, then it could invade Australia. Consequently, on 23 August the Australian Chiefs of Staff recommended that the 8th division should go to Malaya or India. The New Zealand Chiefs of Staff found Churchill's pledge to sacrifice the Mediterranean for the Far East 'most heartening'.⁶³ However, New Zealand 'did not entertain any great expectations of what Britain could do to help if war came to the Pacific, and if it did come its main hope was in the United States. It seems a fair assumption that this remained the case after Churchill on 11 August restored the British guarantee'.⁶⁴ Perhaps the apparent generosity of Churchill's words only helped to increase the scepticism with which were received. In general, the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff agreed with Britain's assessment. They continued to adhere to the policy of imperial defence, believing that 'Singapore still remains the key-stone of British defence in the Far East'.⁶⁵ They concluded that when Britain had its defence talks with the Dutch, Australian and New Zealand representatives should be present. However, their hope rested with the United States.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, paragraph 3.

⁶² McGibbon, *Blue-water*, p 361.

⁶³ *COS Paper No. 15*.

⁶⁴ Wood, *NZPW*, p 196.

⁶⁵ *COS Paper No. 51*, paragraph (c), p 10.

In mid August 1940, John McEwen, the Australian Minister for External Affairs, submitted a proposal to the Australian Cabinet for exchanging liaison officers with New Zealand's Department of External Affairs. McEwen seemed to be overlooking the fact that at this stage New Zealand did not actually have a department of external affairs. Its foreign policy was managed in the Prime Ministers Department under the able hand of Berendsen. McEwen wanted to encourage trans-Tasman defence co-operation and consultation before policies were formulated. He said that Australia and New Zealand might soon find themselves alone in the Pacific threatened by Japan. He recalled that lack of consultation in 1939 over expeditionary forces had caused Australia political embarrassment. This policy of exchanging liaison officers had obvious advantages. Despite this, McEwen still felt that he had to stress how economical this proposal was as it meant that it would not be necessary to exchange High Commissioners between the countries. Although this proposal was approved, it was not implemented. Day suggests that this was because Australia did not want to appear to be pursuing policies separate from those in London. However, it also reflected the low priority that external affairs had in Australia at this time and that Australia was still operating within an imperial framework.⁶⁶

The Australian government's most ambitious aspect of its foreign policy in this period was its support of the Free French movement. After France had fallen in June, the French colonies in the Pacific found themselves in an awkward position. The Vichy Minister for Colonies stated in August 1940 that French colonies which continued to fight against Germany were committing an act of treason. A 'Free France' movement led by French nationalist Charles de Gaulle aimed to continue the war from the French colonies. Australia agreed to encourage the French colonies to continue their resistance against the Axis powers. As part of this policy, Australia decided in late June to send representatives to the French in the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Menzies appointed B.C. Ballard to Noumea to be High Commissioner of New Caledonia where he arrived on 23 August 1940. This move was intended to assist the French officials in the Pacific and to encourage trade relations with Australia. The New Hebrides, which was administered as an Anglo-French Condominium, had already declared itself in favour of the 'Free France' stance after

⁶⁶ Day, *Great Betrayal*, p 99.

consultation between French Resident Commissioner M. Sautot and British Resident Commissioner R.D. Blandy. Pressure was mounting upon the Governor of New Caledonia, M. Pelicier, who was torn between the supporters of de Gaulle and those of Marshal Philippe Petain, the leader of Vichy France. Because Pelicier had divided loyalties, the Vichy government wanted him to be removed. The Vichy government then appointed Colonel Denis as Governor of New Caledonia on 30 August. Sautot was asked by de Gaulle to visit New Caledonia to inspire the 'Free France' movement. Later on 6 September de Gaulle asked him to overthrow Denis and take up the position of Governor of New Caledonia, which he accepted. The Australian government decided on 9 September to support this 'coup de force'. Most of the inhabitants of New Caledonia were in favour of continuing the war except for a few local Japanese. Sautot was escorted to Noumea by the Australian cruiser *Adelaide*. Obviously, the Australian government realised that its navy was no match for the Japanese Navy and was therefore careful to avoid any incidents with these Japanese locals which could be used as an excuse by the Japanese to establish a puppet government. The *Adelaide* arrived on 19 September and Sautot was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd. Denis was arrested that afternoon and Sautot assumed command without any blood being shed.⁶⁷ Australia fostered trade with New Caledonia, buying its nickel. Throughout its involvement in the 'Free France' movement Australia was anxious to avoid being seen as acting in an imperial or dictatorial manner.

The shocking condition of the defences of Singapore was revealed at the Far East Defence Conference, held at Singapore from 22 to 31 October 1940. Representatives from the British Commonwealth attended. Discussion at the conference focussed upon the likely Allied response to Japanese aggression into the Far East and the Pacific. Air Chief Marshal Brook-Popham was appointed Commander-in-Chief of Singapore. The conference noted the dangers faced by the Tasman neighbours, concluding that while 'the possibility of a major expedition against Australia and New Zealand may be ruled out initially, we must still maintain in Australia and New Zealand such army and air forces as are necessary to ensure the maintenance of vital trade, protect troop and other convoys and carry out necessary local defence duties'.⁶⁸ Menzies described to the Advisory War Council on 25 November

⁶⁷ Hasluck, *Govt and People*, vol 1, p 303-311.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p 295.

the 'alarming position in regard to the defence of Singapore'.⁶⁹ All three armed services were operating at dangerously low levels, below what were seen to be the minimum requirements. For example, the desired number of aircraft in the Far East was 582, with a minimum of 336. In November 1940 there were only 48.⁷⁰ Britain's declining strength in the Pacific was now fully realised by Australia and New Zealand. Although the critical condition of Singapore's defences was now glaringly apparent, there were no substantial plans to take any significant action to rectify the situation.

The defences of New Zealand were inadequate. Fraser cabled Churchill on 4 December 1940 asking for help in defending New Zealand. He wrote that

local naval forces are far from adequate to protect New Zealand shores and shipping against attack, and it is a plain fact that at present the New Zealand Air Force possess not one single aircraft suitable either for reconnaissance or for attack against a raider any substantial distance from the shores of New Zealand.⁷¹

Fraser issued a statement on 12 February 1941 saying that the war had 'moved to a new state involving the utmost gravity'. The Australian government was also gravely concerned at the situation. Arthur Fadden, Leader of the Country Party, said that Australia 'was now entering upon a period in which its very existence is at stake'.⁷²

In July 1941 Japanese forces occupied southern Indo-China with the moral support of the Vichy government. Although France had fallen in June 1940 leaving a power vacuum in French Indo-China, it was not until September that Japanese forces attacked the French garrison at Langson and moved into northern Indo-China. In July 1941 the Japanese forces completed what they had begun, and occupied the rest of Indo-China. The United States responded quickly to Japan's occupation of southern Indo-China by imposing economic sanctions upon Japan, virtually stopping all trade, including oil. The oil embargo meant that by December 1941 the Japanese Navy would have consumed four of its eighteen months supply of oil. Japan would be forced to choose between conceding to the United States or making war to obtain essential raw materials.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 296.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p 297.

⁷¹ Wood, *NZPW*, p 213-214.

⁷² Horner, *High Command*, p 55.

The New Zealand government was fully supportive of the United States' action and followed by renouncing its commercial treaties with Japan.⁷³ The Australian government also supported strong action. But, Australia and New Zealand were never fully assured of the support of the United States. Both dominions therefore felt uneasy in the months leading up to Pearl Harbor. The only encouraging sign as far as the Empire-Commonwealth was concerned was a warning issued by Sumner Welles, the United States Under Secretary of State, to the Japanese embassy after Indo-China fell. He said that if Japanese forces moved into Thailand, Singapore or the Netherlands East Indies it was 'quite inevitable ... not necessarily tomorrow or next month, but sooner or later the Japanese Government would find themselves in war with the United States.'⁷⁴

The British government was considering making a declaration that a Japanese attack upon a line from Malaya to New Zealand through the Netherlands East Indies would be seen as a threat to British interests. The South African and Australian governments objected to this because the position of the United States government was not known. Consequently Britain made no declaration, much to the disappointment of the New Zealand.⁷⁵ X

There were many efforts to secure a declaration from the United States that would deter Japan from aggressive action especially after Indo-China had been occupied. There was discussion whether the Empire- Commonwealth should make a declaration without the United States, especially with regard to Thailand, which was threatened. Menzies told Churchill on 11 August 1941 that 'If Thailand is abandoned and we delay our action we will be one country nearer to war'.⁷⁶ Bruce believed that Australia, Britain and Holland should give a guarantee to Thailand, even without the support of the United States. He said 'If the Japanese do not want war but are only testing how far they can go without precipitating it, the warning will halt them. If they are bent on war it will make no difference'.⁷⁷ He also believed that such a declaration would encourage the United States government to enter the war or at least secure sympathy from the American public. Menzies admitted to the Cabinet

⁷³ Wood, *NZPW*, p 200.

⁷⁴ Lissington, *NZ & Japan*, p 164.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p 159.

⁷⁶ Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 1, p 531.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p 530.

that he was disappointed by the United States. The New Zealand government, in August 1941, was reluctant to make any statement about Thailand. Nash, the acting Prime Minister, warned Menzies that ‘The result of any hasty or ill conceived guarantee might well be a repetition of the circumstances surrounding the British guarantee to Poland in 1939’.⁷⁸ This was because if Japan exposed the Allies’ bluff, this would be seen as a grave loss of face, and would encourage Japan to further aggression. The New Zealand approach was cautious and in line with British policy, while the Australian approach was bold.

After much persuasion, Roosevelt did issue a warning to Japan on 17 August 1941. Roosevelt said that if Japan moved into neighbouring countries his government would act to protect the rights of the United States. The British, Australian and New Zealand governments were disappointed. It was a mild warning, avoiding mention of the word ‘war’ or ‘Netherlands East Indies’. Almost in desperation Churchill publicly declared that Britain would support the United States if it became involved in a war with Japan.

Meanwhile there was a political upheaval in Australia. Menzies resigned as Prime Minister on 18 August 1941 and said that he was prepared to serve under Fadden. The following day Fadden became Prime Minister. He formed a new ministry with Menzies as the Minister of Defence. However, this ministry did not last long. Fadden’s ‘forty days and forty nights’ concluded when Curtin became Prime Minister on 3 October 1941 with the support of independents who held the balance of power. After being in Opposition throughout the war, Labor was now the government. The transition was smooth as Curtin, Francis Michael Forde, Norman John Oswald Makin, Evatt and J.A. Beasley, Leader of the Non-Communist Labor Party, were already serving on the Advisory War Council and were familiar with what was happening in the War Cabinet and with the confidential dispatches that the Government had received throughout the war. Consequently, Forde was appointed the Minister of the Army; Makin became the Minister of the Navy and Munitions, Evatt became Attorney General and Minister of External Affairs, and Beasley became the Minister of Supply and Development.

⁷⁸ Nash to Menzies, 14 Aug 1941, *Documents III*, Doc 48.

The situation in the Pacific deteriorated rapidly causing the Dominions Office to inform the Australian and New Zealand governments on 29 November that the Washington talks were likely to break down. War with Japan was a likely possibility. It was not until 5 December 1941 that the Allies received an assurance from the United States. This guarantee indicated that, if necessary, armed force would be used to stop Japan taking the Kra Isthmus or any part of Thailand, or if it attacked the Netherlands East Indies.⁷⁹ The United States assurance also applied if the Japanese attacked any territory in the Empire-Commonwealth. The assurance that Britain, Australia and New Zealand had sought after for so long was finally received two days before the dramatic Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The most striking feature of trans-Tasman relations from September 1939 until December 1941 was that despite the low levels of contact between the two countries the Australian and New Zealand governments independently followed very similar policies. On a political and diplomatic plane, neither country sought closer relations. The misunderstandings that had resulted from a lack of understanding or consultation were frustrating for politicians of both countries. Yet, it did not motivate them to closer consultation. Trans-Tasman relations were not a high priority as they would serve no immediate purpose. The benefits did not outweigh the costs at this stage.

⁷⁹ Cranborne to Curtin, 5 December 1941, *DAFP V*, Doc 162.

Chapter 4

Twelve Months of Turmoil: Australia and New Zealand's efforts to get a Voice in London and Washington, December 1941-November 1942

Japan launched its attack upon United States, British and Asian territory on 7/8 December 1941. Japanese forces attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor and colonial outposts from Hong Kong to Manila and from Malaya to Singapore. At the same time Japan began landing forces in Thailand. This surprise attack was on a massive scale covering 9500 km, one quarter of the earth's circumference. It revealed that Japan's diplomacy with the United States in the previous weeks in which Kurusu, Japan's special envoy to the United States, had talked with Hull, was little more than a highly successful piece of strategic deception. This attack dramatically opened the war in the Pacific, intensified the war in Asia, and linked the war in Asia with that in Europe and the Middle East. It changed the nature of the war making it global.

The first that Curtin heard of the attack was when he was woken from his sleep at Victoria Palace Hotel in central Melbourne after important material was gathered by the Department of Information.¹ By breakfast the Australian Service Chiefs and War Cabinet had met at Victoria barracks. They knew that Pearl Harbor was being attacked, but had not confirmed that Japan was the aggressor. A telegram arrived from the Dominions Office saying that Malaya was being attacked by the Japanese and that the British Admiralty was commencing hostilities against Japan immediately. After discussion, the Australian government agreed to declare war on Japan on 8 December.

The opening of the war in the Pacific raised unwelcome strategic questions and considerations for the Australia and New Zealand governments. While Australia had three divisions and New Zealand had one division of battle-hardened soldiers in the Mediterranean Theatre, Japan posed a threat closer to home. For Australia this meant that although from 8 December 1941 its main war effort was directed against Japan, its best

¹ Hasluck, *Govt & People* vol 2, p 4.

soldiers were in the Middle East. Australia was fighting two wars, a distant one against Germany and Italy and a closer one against Japan. New Zealand responded by reinforcing its forces in the Pacific to create a two brigade division. New Zealand's B Force of 2NZEF adopted the title of New Zealand's 3rd division on 14 May 1942.

The New Zealand Chiefs of Staff met with the politicians on 8 December 1941 to advise them of the situation. They reacted soberly and said that 'until Singapore fell and until the United States naval forces suffered a major defeat, invasion of New Zealand was most improbable'.² It was felt that at least six months would have to pass before New Zealand could be in danger of invasion. The New Zealand Chiefs of Staff reassessed the situation on 30 December. Their verdict was essentially the same: Singapore had to fall and the United States Fleet be destroyed before New Zealand was in danger. It was felt that although highly unlikely, it was possible for the United States Fleet to be destroyed in a matter of hours. In the worst case scenario, if invasion was coming, New Zealand had only three months to prepare. The New Zealand Chiefs of Staff's assessment on 10 January 1942 was virtually the same. There was much calmness in Wellington since New Zealand could not be invaded until after the United States Navy had been eliminated. It was felt that Japan would try to cut New Zealand-United States sea routes instead of invading New Zealand. However, the government on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff acted responsibly, and preparing for the worst case scenario ordered mobilisation on 10 January 1942.

The Australian government's military response to Pearl Harbor was the decision to suspend the dispatch of trainees overseas to the Empire Air Training Scheme. The Royal Australian Air Force recalled forces to defend northern Australia. Apart from three divisions in the Middle East, Australia in December 1941 had a two brigade division in Malaya, one battalion in Rabaul and two battalions earmarked for Ambon and Timor.³ Because of an agreement made with the Dutch, Australia sent the two battalions from Darwin to Ambon and Timor on 8 December. The Australian battalion which had been at Rabaul since April 1941 remained. These were drops in the bucket in the face of the Japanese onslaught.

² Wood, *NZPW*, p 214.

³ Robertson, *Australia at War*, p 78.

The Australian and New Zealand governments were gravely concerned by the rapid advance of the Japanese in the early phase of the war in the Pacific. The Japanese forces took Guam and landed forces in the Philippines on 10 December. That same day, they sank Britain's naval reinforcements to the Far East: the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser *Repulse*. These two ships had arrived in Singapore on 2 December 1941, but the aircraft carrier assigned to accompany them had run aground and not arrived. They, therefore lacked air cover and were easily sunk by Japanese aircraft. This was a heavy blow as British naval power was destroyed. David Day writes that 'Churchill later claimed to have suffered nightmares from the shock of losing these ships that had been sent at his insistence, though he had been forewarned that they were "far more likely to act as bait than as deterrent"''.⁴

The Australian War Cabinet was disturbed by the situation and met after receiving advice from the Chiefs of Staff and the Advisory War Council. The Chiefs of Staff's position on 11 December 1941 was that they expected Japan to attack New Caledonia, New Guinea and Papua. Worse still, they expected Japan to attempt to seize Darwin and to launch raids on concentrations of industry in Sydney, Newcastle and Port Kembla.⁵

The Australian nation was transformed to a total war footing from December 1941 until February 1942. Lighting restrictions began, trenches were dug, glass was removed from windows, barbed wire was installed on beaches and mid-week sport was banned. The War Cabinet ordered on 16 December 1941 that women and children be evacuated from Darwin. Many others in northern areas moved south by choice. By the first week of February, 6 800 people had left Cairns and Townsville by train.⁶

As they contemplated their new predicament, the Tasman neighbours had to reconsider their role in the allied war effort. When strategy at the highest level was discussed, neither Australia nor New Zealand was present. For example, the Arcadia Conference was opened on 22 December 1941. This was an Anglo-American conference which centred on talks between Churchill and Roosevelt about the war in the Pacific and the

⁴ Day, *Great Betrayal*, p 210.

⁵ Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 2, p 12-13.

⁶ Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 2, p 64-69.

Middle East. At this conference the 'Germany First' policy was confirmed by the United States and the ABDA Command in the Pacific was established.

The United States had accepted and adhered to a 'Germany First' policy. This was the result of a great deal of persuasion by Churchill. Although Roosevelt agreed to this, there was a strong 'Pacific First' lobby in Washington. From January to March 1942 United States troops leaving for the Pacific outnumbered those going to Britain by four to one.⁷ As late as December 1942, the United States had 350 000 men in the Pacific and approximately the same number in the Mediterranean Theatre.

Fraser and Curtin were informed of Roosevelt's and Churchill's agreed command structure for the Pacific on 29 December 1941 that was later known as the ABDA Command. Australian and New Zealand consent was urgently needed as the plan was to be publicly announced on 1 January 1942 at the latest. General Wavell, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East, would be appointed Commander-in-Chief of all United States, British, Dutch and Empire-Commonwealth land, naval, and air forces for the Southeast Asia and Southwest Pacific Area.⁸ The boundaries of this theatre were not finally settled but would probably include Malaya, Burma, the Philippines, Port Darwin and Northern Australia. The important commands within the Southwest Pacific area were Burma, Singapore and Malaya, Netherlands East Indies, the Philippines, and Southern Communications via the South Pacific and Northern Australia. There was also India and ~~and~~ ^{and} Australia. Commanders of subcommands of ABDA Area were not allowed to transfer their allocated forces out of their command area. The telegram concluded on an encouraging note for Australia and New Zealand. 'The United States Navy will remain responsible for the whole Pacific Ocean east of the Philippine Islands and Australasia, including the United States approaches to Australasia.'⁹ The United States Navy was then responsible for the Pacific east of the Philippines including the Northeastern approaches to Australasia.¹⁰

⁷ Robertson, *Aust at War*, p 107.

⁸ Cranborne to Fraser, 29 December 1941, *Documents III*, Doc 112.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Lissington, *NZ & US*, p 40.

Curtin expressed his disapproval to Churchill of the piecemeal way in which Allied forces would be deployed in the Pacific on 1 January 1942. His concern was that the Australian mainland was excluded from the proposed Southwest Pacific area. This, he felt, would leave Australia and New Zealand isolated to defend themselves without the help of the United States naval, military and air support.¹¹ The Australian government also had its concerns about the ABDA Area. It did not like the Pacific being divided, New Zealand being separated from Australia, or the British Eastern Fleet being in the Indian Ocean and not in the Pacific.¹²

The command structure in the Southwest Pacific Area was referred to as the agreement between the ABDA governments (American, British, Dutch, Australian). The boundary of the command was finalised on 4 January 1942 and the command was known as ABDACOM (American, British, Dutch, Australian Command). It included Burma, Thailand, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, the Philippine Islands, Western New Guinea, and Northern Australia above a line running from Onslow on the west coast to the Southeast corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The New Zealand government's main concern about the structure of the commands was that it was possible for Japan to effect a piecemeal defeat of the Allied forces in the Pacific. This was because the commanders in the units within the ABDA Area were not allowed to transfer forces into or out of their command area. Although the New Zealand government supported Wavell as Commander-in-Chief, it wanted all naval forces to be concentrated under an American Admiral.¹³ Fraser was concerned that the sea communications between Australia and the United States were not protected. Viscount Cranborne, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, responded to Fraser's concern. He said that he was 'trying hard to get the Americans to assume naval responsibility' for the waters east of Australia.¹⁴ He said that it would be natural for the United States to assume operational control over Australia's and New Zealand's vessels. Fraser also said that although he realised the importance of making quick decisions in war, his government

¹¹ Curtin to Churchill, 1 January 1942, *DAFP V*, Doc 247.

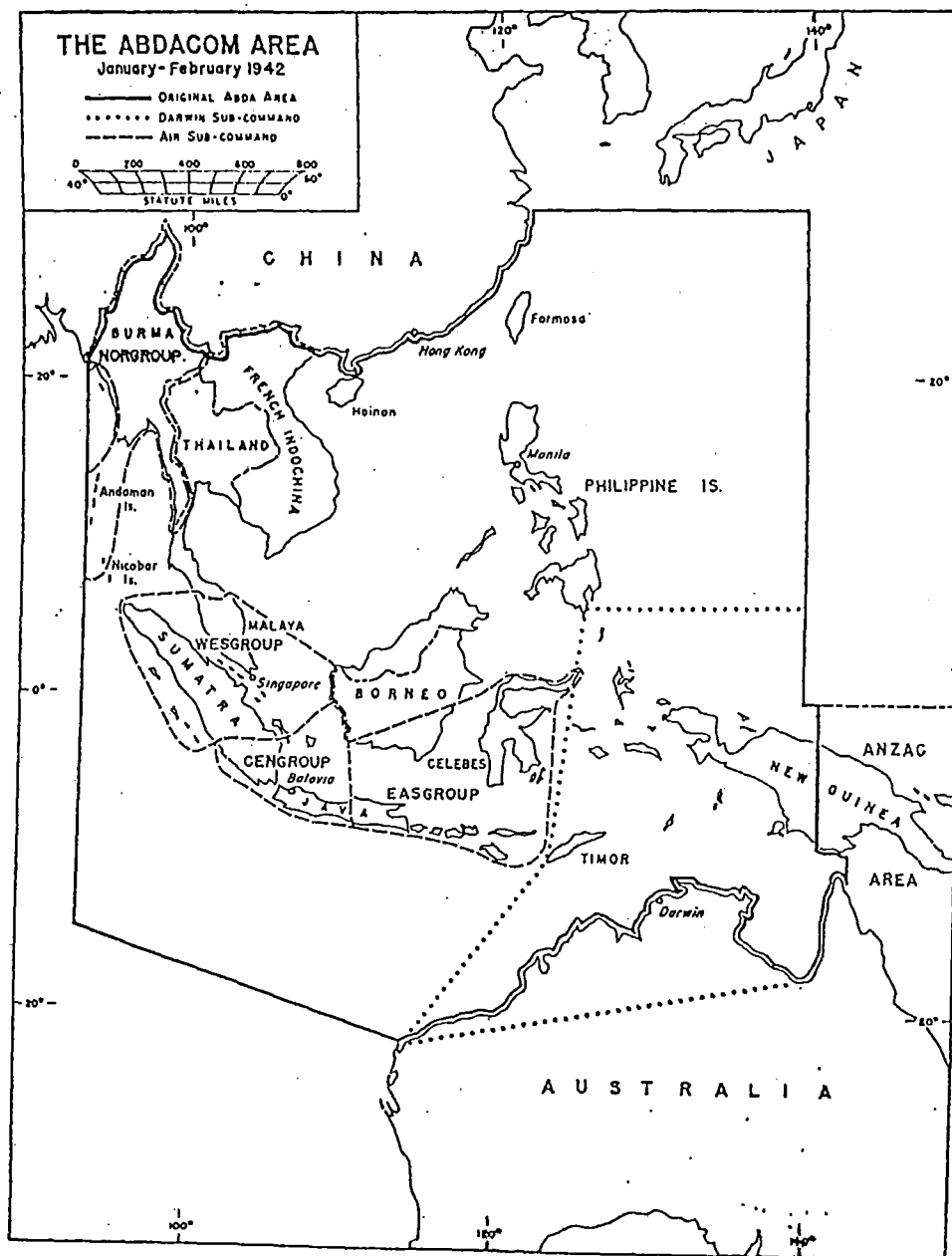
¹² Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 2, p 49-50.

¹³ Fraser to Cranborne, 30 Dec 1941, *Documents III*, Doc 113.

¹⁴ Cranborne to Fraser, 8 January 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 116.

MAP I

THE ABDACOM AREA¹⁵



¹⁵ Source: Horner, *High Command*, p148.

wanted to receive more information from London and Washington to allow it to make more informed decisions. Fraser wanted co-operation between the New Zealand navy and the Australian navy because ABDACOM did not include the mainland of Australia or New Zealand.

The Australian government gained valuable insight into American strategic thinking in the Pacific through information gleaned from Casey in Washington. He said that 'While lip service is paid to the importance of Singapore its importance is clearly subordinated to Philippines in American minds.'¹⁶ Curtin and Evatt made strenuous efforts after Pearl Harbor to influence the higher direction of the war, both in London and in Washington. Curtin asked Churchill and Roosevelt for more modern equipment and more men to defend Australia. He urged Britain to join its Eastern Fleet with the remains of the United States Pacific Fleet. Frederick Shedden, the Secretary of the Australian Defence Department, War Cabinet and Advisory Council, wrote a report on 26 December 1941. He argued that Australia should be involved in deciding Allied strategy. He said that the positioning of forces should be according to the degree of danger present in each theatre of war.¹⁷ Curtin told Churchill that he opposed any suggestion of dividing naval forces to attempt to cover large areas of the oceans.¹⁸ If the United States and British fleets were combined it would make a decisive naval victory over the Japanese fleet possible.

The Australian government felt a desperate need to have input into decisions affecting the war in the Pacific. It strongly felt that it was necessary for Australia to play a significant role in the forming of strategy and in the high command in the Pacific. The government's anxiety to play a large role in the Pacific, severely strained Anglo-Australian relations. Curtin was furious when Churchill told him on 25 December 1941 that although he planned to reinforce Malaya, North Africa had priority over Singapore. Curtin did not accept this, especially after V.G. Bowden, Australia's official representative in Singapore, told Evatt on 14 December that Singapore will 'shortly be in a virtual state of siege'.¹⁹ Curtin responded the following day, telling Casey that 'The stage of gentle suggestion has

¹⁶ Casey to External Affairs Dept, 20 Dec 1941, *DAFP V*, Doc 210.

¹⁷ Day, *Great Betrayal*, p 216-217.

¹⁸ Curtin to Casey, 29 December 1941, *DAFP V*, Doc 237.

¹⁹ Bowden to Evatt, 14 December 1941, *Ibid*, Doc 193.

now passed.²⁰ He stressed that the situation in Singapore was urgent and reinforcements were needed immediately. Churchill was still in Washington attending the Arcadia Conference. Casey had the opportunity to speak with Churchill alone at the White House on 27 December. Casey's efforts to convince Churchill of the importance of Singapore, failed. Churchill told Casey, 'You can't kick me round the room, I'm not kickable.'²¹

Curtin recognised that Britain could do little to assist Australia in the Pacific and his New Year statement was designed to encourage assistance from the United States. This 'turning to America' statement was published in the *Melbourne Herald* on 27 December 1941. Curtin disputed the Germany First policy: 'We refuse to accept the dictum that the Pacific struggle must be treated as a subordinate segment of the general conflict.'²² He said x that the United States should concentrate its main effort in the Pacific and called for the Soviet Union to attack Japan.²³ This attitude, Churchill recalled, was 'flaunted around the world by our enemies', displaying a worrying lack of unity in Allied war policy. Curtin expressed his disillusionment with the British: 'Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links of kinship with the United Kingdom.'²⁴ This provoked much reaction from the British government. Churchill was stung by this comment and instructed his Dominions Secretary that he 'should take a firm stand against this misbehaviour'.²⁵ He then wrote to Curtin, 'I have been greatly pained in all my labours by the harsh tones which have characterised your various messages.'²⁶ In response to Churchill's strong reactions Curtin later stated that no one was 'more steadfast in loyalty to the king than Australia'.²⁷

Despite Churchill's accusation that Curtin's statement 'made a very bad impression in high American circles'²⁸ this was not the case. Roosevelt was not concerned by divisions within the Empire-Commonwealth. Bell writes that 'during the war and immediate post-

²⁰ Quoted in Robertson, *Australia at War*, p 79.

²¹ Casey, *Personal Experiences 1936-1946*, p 81.

²² W.S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol IV: *the Hinge of Fate*, (London, 1953) p 22.

²³ Day, *Great Betrayal*, p 227.

²⁴ Quoted in Robertson, *Australia at War*, p 79.

²⁵ Bell, *Unequal Allies*, p 48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Robertson, *Australia at War*, p 79.

²⁸ Bell, *Unequal Allies*, p 49.

war months, the U.S. consistently sought to undermine Imperial economic and political unity to restrict British Commonwealth influence in the Pacific.’²⁹

New Zealand, like Australia, also wished to have a voice in the higher direction of the war in the Pacific. Fraser sent a telegram to Churchill on 12 January 1942 expressing his views on the war situation. He analysed the present state of the war emphasising the critical position in the Pacific. Although Fraser appreciated Britain’s efforts, he said ‘to be completely frank, we have not always felt that the potential problems of the Pacific here had the importance attached to them in London which we, more intimately concerned therewith, have considered that they have perhaps deserved.’³⁰ Fraser said that it was imperative that the Pacific be treated as being as important as the Mediterranean Theatre. Fraser considered the use of the term ‘Southwest Pacific’ by the United States to be misleading as it included neither the Australian mainland nor New Zealand. He repeated his concerns about the way ABDACOM was divided into smaller commands which dispersed forces and at the way an American admiral commands the rest of the Pacific and a British admiral commands the Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. Fraser said ‘Frankly this seems to us to be a step in the wrong direction.’³¹ He preferred a unified strategic command covering the whole of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Stressing the importance of gaining naval supremacy over the Japanese, he said that a single naval command was imperative. He said that ‘we must concentrate our forces or we will run a serious risk or be defeated piecemeal’.³² Fraser also pointed out that although New Zealand was not part of the ABDA Command and had few men in the Pacific its safety depended on what happened in the Pacific. Consequently, the New Zealand government wanted consultation.

Fraser told Churchill that as the nature of the war had changed New Zealand wanted to have a say in how it would be run. He said that in the past New Zealand was content to adhere to what the British Chiefs of Staff decided, as the war had been confined to the Middle East and Europe. ‘Now, however, that the war has moved to our doorstep. I am sure you will agree that where matters under discussion are of immediate and direct concern

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Fraser to Cranborne, 12 January 1942, *Documents III*, Doc 117.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

to us there must be some method devised by which we can intelligently form and explicitly express our views before action is taken.³³ He recognised that there might be some difficulty in achieving sufficient consultation. He was against the idea of dominion Prime Ministers constantly meeting in London or of one Prime Minister representing all the dominions. He said that his government was gravely concerned about the situation: 'the unthinkable is now in everybody's mind' - the fall of Singapore. Fraser said that his government was responsible for the welfare of its people and that it must prepare for the worst. Fraser was conscious that the New Zealand government knew very little of the higher direction of the war and was almost completely ignorant of the intentions of the United States. He concluded by telling Churchill: 'We feel we must have an eye, an ear and a voice wherever decisions affecting New Zealand are to be made and we are by no means happy with the arrangements so far as we know them for the conduct of the war against Japan.'³⁴ Somewhat cynically, the writer of one of New Zealand's war narratives commented: 'One might point out here that although New Zealand desired an arrangement whereby she would be more fully consulted on developments in the Pacific, there is no evidence that the PM was able to provide any constructive suggestions.'³⁵

In response to these concerns from the Australian and New Zealand governments, Roosevelt agreed to establish a naval area known as the Anzac Command. Churchill told Fraser on 14 January 1942 about this command, agreed to by the United States Navy and Roosevelt. The Anzac Command covered the east coast of Australia, eastern New Guinea, the Tasman Sea, the South Island and the western half of the North Island of New Zealand and the seas to the north.³⁶ The aim of this command was to protect the Northeastern approaches to Australia and New Zealand. The Anzac Command was a concession that the United States offered to Australia and New Zealand because of the concerns that they had expressed. The United States said that it undertook to provide Australia and New Zealand with all ships, planes and munitions they needed to defend themselves and to carry out duties in the Anzac Area. However, the concession offered was small: Britain would supply only one aircraft carrier and the United States only one light or heavy cruiser. The bulk of

³³ Quoted in Wood, *NZPW*, p 217.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p 218.

³⁵ *The Defence of the Pacific 1942*, p 17-18.

³⁶ Lissington, *NZ & US*, p 41.

forces would come from Australia which would supply two heavy cruisers, one old light cruiser, three armed merchant cruisers, three destroyers, three sloops and two anti-submarine patrol vessels. New Zealand would supply two light cruisers and one armed merchant cruiser. The Anzac Command was under the Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, and the forces therein were seen as an extension of the United States Pacific Fleet. Australia's naval force were divided between ABDACOM and the Anzac Command.

The New Zealand government did not want to respond to Britain or the United States with its views about the Anzac Command until it had consulted with Australia first.³⁷ The New Zealand government felt that the best aspect of the Anzac Command was that it would guarantee a United States naval presence. It accepted the proposal, assuming it to be a temporary one while the Allies were on the defensive in the Pacific. The New Zealand government was consistently opposed to the division of naval forces in the Pacific. Although the Anzac proposal encouraged this division of naval forces, it was the best offer that New Zealand had received. Fraser informed Curtin of these views and asked for his opinions on the matter. Curtin does not seem to have replied. The Anzac Command was established on 30 January 1942.

Churchill replied on 17 January 1942 to Fraser's frank expression of views about the war situation of 12 January. He addressed Fraser's desire for a naval command that would cover the whole of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Churchill said 'Frankly, I find this idea more attractive in theory than, in my view, it could work out in practice, unless it were possible for the United States Navy Department and the British Admiralty, with the Naval Boards of Australia and New Zealand and the Dutch Government, to be merged into one large United National Navy Department.'³⁸ He said that the United States Navy controlled the naval forces in the ABDA Area, Pacific Ocean and Anzac Area. Churchill still wanted to exert some control in the Pacific, even though British power had been virtually destroyed in this theatre. He suggested that a ministerial body be formed in London consisting of New Zealand, Dutch and Australian politicians to provide the representation that the Tasman neighbours required. This would of course depend upon Roosevelt. One suspects that Churchill's reasons for his criticisms were directed by his concerns that a unified command

³⁷ Fraser to Curtin; 16 January 1942, *Documents III*, Doc 120.

³⁸ Cranborne to Fraser; 17 Feb 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 121.

would operate under the United States. This would demonstrate clearly that the United States was controlling the Pacific and not the Empire-Commonwealth; a concept that Churchill was reluctant to accept.

Curtin asked the British government if it would allow a representative to sit on Britain's War Cabinet. On 22 January 1942 Britain agreed to the Australian government's request on the condition that this representative could commit Australia on urgent matters. Sir Earl Page then represented Australia on Britain's War Cabinet. Fraser asked Churchill if New Zealand would be allowed similar representation. Churchill told Fraser on 27 January that New Zealand was welcome to send a special representative who would be on a par with Page.³⁹ Fraser replied that he was considering who would be a suitable representative to send. However, the only time that a New Zealand representative sat on Britain's War Cabinet was when Fraser or Nash visited London. This is an example that typifies the differences between Australia's and New Zealand's attempts to get a voice in the higher direction in the war. Australia asked Britain for representation and when the request was accepted used Page to exert influence. New Zealand, while following Australia and requesting representation, did not send a representative. The Australian government was more prepared than the New Zealand government to push hard to gain a voice in the higher direction in the war and more likely to take advantage of any opportunities that were offered to achieve this objective. Although the Australian government did not find having a representative on Britain's War Cabinet had a significant influence upon war policy, at least it afforded some insight and information into Britain's war policies.

Meanwhile, the Australian government was growing nervous about the war situation in the Pacific. On a single day, 23 January 1942, the Japanese captured Rabaul in New Britain⁴⁰, Kaviengin in New Ireland, landed at Bougainville in the Solomon Islands and invaded Borneo and Celebes in the Netherlands East Indies. The position of Malaya was desperate. The Australian government responded by calling an emergency War Cabinet meeting, that was presided over by Forde as Curtin was in Western Australia. Members of the War Cabinet began to blame Britain for the situation. Beasley said that 'Unless the

³⁹ Cranborne to Fraser; 27 January 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 131.

⁴⁰ The War Cabinet was not aware that Rabaul had fallen. They did know that it had been invaded and that if it was taken it would place Japanese forces within striking distance of New Guinea.

British Empire wants its annals to contain another Dunkirk, another Greece, another Crete, more guns, aeroplanes, troops and ships must get to Malaya now'.⁴¹ The War Cabinet approved the dispatch of a telegram to Churchill requesting urgent reinforcements for Malaya.

After this meeting Evatt received two vital pieces of information, and responded by dramatically amending the third paragraph of the telegram that the War Cabinet had agreed to send to Churchill. The first new piece of information was a telegram from Page who said that the Defence Committee in London had just considered the evacuation of Malaya and Singapore. Page wrote that Churchill received a message from Wavell noting that the situation in Malaya was grave. Singapore had no defences on its northern shores facing Malaya or across the Johore Strait. This had prompted Churchill to call a special meeting of the Defence Committee. At this meeting it was asked whether the evacuation of Singapore should now be considered and if the proposed reinforcements should instead be sent to keep the Burma Road open. Page said that he had argued strongly against evacuation. 'Evacuation would cause irreparable damage to the Allied cause quite apart from its military aspect.'⁴² The second new piece of information was the fall of Rabaul.

With Curtin on holiday in Western Australia, Evatt intervened and ensured that the telegram sent a powerful message.⁴³ Specifically, Evatt wrote

Page has reported the Defence Committee has been considering evacuation of Malaya and Singapore. After all the assurances we have been given, the evacuation of Singapore would be regarded here and elsewhere as an inexcusable betrayal. Singapore is a central fortress in the system of Empire and local defence ... we understood that it was to be made impregnable and in any event it was to be capable of holding out for a prolonged period until arrival of the main fleet.⁴⁴

The telegram concluded that as far as supplies and reinforcements were concerned 'we have acted and carried out our part of the bargain. We expect you not to frustrate the whole purpose by evacuation.'⁴⁵ On the following day the War Cabinet met and Evatt informed it of Page's telegram and secured their assent to his dramatic amendments to the telegram to

⁴¹ Quoted in Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 2, p 3.

⁴² Page to Curtin, 22 January 1942, *DAFP V*, Doc 292.

⁴³ Horner, *High Command*, p 151.

⁴⁴ Curtin to Churchill, 23 January 1942, *DAFP V*, Doc 294.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Churchill. The Advisory War Council also agreed that day to Evatt's telegram seemingly without any discussion. Menzies and McEwen later claimed that they had disagreed, but Shedden did not record any dissent.⁴⁶ In Curtin's absence, Evatt's powerful telegram was sent to Churchill.

Churchill was shocked by this language. He told Curtin 'I really cannot pass without comment such language to me as "inexcusable betrayal". I make all allowances for your anxiety and will not allow such discourtesy to cloud my judgement or lessen my efforts on your behalf.'⁴⁷ Churchill was stung by Australia's telegram and this was evident in his comments in the House of Commons on 27 January 1942. When assessing the grim Far Eastern situation he said, 'everything in human power that we can do to help Australia, or persuade America to do, we will do; and meanwhile I trust that reproaches and recriminations of all kinds will be avoided, and that if any are made, we in Britain shall not take any part in them.'⁴⁸

The United States Chiefs of Staff were not impressed with the strong reactions of the Australian government. When a battle was being lost, there was a point when the decision to withdraw had to be made before all was lost. Drawing up evacuation plans was a standard part of formulating military policy. The United States Chiefs of Staff believed that it would have been 'criminally negligent' if Britain had not planned for the worst case scenario.⁴⁹

Fraser told Churchill that as New Zealand's naval forces would be used in the Anzac Area, some means of communicating with and making representation to and consulting directly with the United States Navy was needed. He told Churchill on 22 January 1942 that he welcomed the prospect of close naval co-operation with the United States. Fraser suggested that New Zealand could be represented by a liaison officer on the staff of the

⁴⁶ Horner, *High Command*, p 152.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Horner, *High Command*, p152.

⁴⁸ Churchill's Speech to the House of Commons, The War Situation, 27 January 1942; R.R. James, *Winston Churchill; His Complete Speeches*, vol VI, (New York, 1974) p 6568.

⁴⁹ Horner, *High Command*, p 153.

United States Admiral.⁵⁰ However, Fraser desired that New Zealand should be in direct contact with representatives from the United States and other Pacific powers.

On 24 January, Churchill explained to Fraser about the proposed Far Eastern Defence Council in London that he had mentioned earlier.⁵¹ Churchill would be the chairman and there would be one ministerial representative each from Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands plus any advisers who might need to be summoned. This body would also be in contact with the British Chiefs of Staff Committee. In Washington, there would be the Combined Chiefs of Staff which included representatives of Britain's three Chiefs of Staff and the United States' three Chiefs of Staff. Churchill offered to represent the combined views of New Zealand and Australia and all those on the London Far Eastern Defence Council to Roosevelt. Essentially, the Far Eastern Defence Council in London was to be a political one and the Washington Council a strategic one. The London Council was attractive to Churchill as he would have the opportunity to exert his influence over the dominions, whilst excluding the United States from influencing them.

Fraser responded that Churchill's explanation of the Far Eastern Council in London left him 'perplexed and, to be candid, unconvinced.'⁵² Churchill explained that if any of the ABDA governments had a proposal it would simultaneously proceed to both conferences. The New Zealand government again had to remind the British that it was not one of the ABDA governments. Fraser said that New Zealand needed direct representation with Roosevelt because of the Anzac Command. He said that the structure of the two councils (one in London one in Washington) 'are not attractive to us'. Further, it 'would surely be cumbersome'.⁵³

The United States did not look favourably upon the idea of Australia and New Zealand having input into military decisions that were made in Washington. Churchill forwarded to Fraser the opinions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 2 February. The general feeling was that

⁵⁰ Fraser to WSC, 22 January 1942, *Documents III*, Doc 125.

⁵¹ Cranborne to Fraser; 24 January 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 126.

⁵² Fraser to Cranborne; 26 Jan 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 129.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

all political and Governmental matters concerning New Zealand, Australia, and the Netherlands East Indies should continue to be handled in London and that military matters be resolved here. However, to have all these countries represented by three men on the Joint Staff considering ABDA problems would provide for an altogether unwieldy body.⁵⁴

The New Zealand government still held serious doubts about the viability of the Far Eastern Defence Council in London. Fraser told Churchill on 6 February 1942 that if the Far Eastern Council in London proceeded without the representation of the United States 'a mistake is being made which in our opinion may prove serious.'⁵⁵ The United States had already made it clear that it did not want New Zealand military advisers telling it what to do with its forces.

Nash, in Washington, was also gravely concerned about the proposal to establish a Far Eastern Council in London. He had ten reasons why he opposed the suggestion: (1) a unified high command was essential; (2) a council in London was disadvantageous geographically, strategically and politically; (3) it encouraged a sectarian British and Commonwealth view; (4) strategically, it encouraged the idea of Britain advancing east from the Indian Ocean and the United States advancing west from Hawaii; (5) London was too far away geographically to make a proper appreciation; (6) London should direct war in Europe and the Mediterranean, while Washington should direct war in the Pacific; (7) Australian and New Zealand representatives should sit on the Washington War Council; (8) Command should be unified under one person in London and one person in Washington; (9) pre war policies and present loyalties count for nothing if we lose the war; and (10) you can only carry out a successful Pacific campaign from Washington.⁵⁶ Nash's seventh suggestion had already been rejected by the United States as being 'unwieldy'.

Despite Fraser's reservations, he decided that New Zealand would give the Far Eastern Council in London a 'fair trial'.⁵⁷ Nash, assumed that he was the best man to represent New Zealand on the London council and should supersede William Joseph Jordan who was New Zealand's High Commissioner in London. Nash said this before Fraser

⁵⁴ *Defence of the Pacific*, p 32.

⁵⁵ Fraser to Cranborne; 6 February 1942, *Documents III*, Doc 135.

⁵⁶ Nash to Fraser; 6 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 136.

⁵⁷ Fraser to Nash; 19 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 145.

confirmed he was the suitable candidate for this position. Consequently, he arranged for Nash to travel to London to represent New Zealand.

Despite Curtin's concerns about Japan, it was Churchill who first raised the possibility of returning any of the Australian divisions from the Middle East to the Far East. Churchill sent a telegram to the United States Chiefs of Staff Committee on 16 December 1941 suggesting that one Australian division be transferred to Singapore.⁵⁸ It was eventually agreed by Britain and Australia that the 6th and 7th divisions would leave the Middle East to reinforce Singapore. The aim was that they would land in Singapore to launch a counter-attack upon Malaya. However, while the reinforcements were on their way to the Far East the situation deteriorated quickly. Malaya was occupied and then Singapore fell on 15 February. Curtin reacted to the news of Singapore's fall by asking Churchill that all remaining Australian AIF troops in the Middle East, as well as those currently being transferred, be sent immediately to Australia.

This was a significant landmark. The only real influence that Australia could exert upon Britain and the United States was a negative one by controlling its armed forces. Even then, the Australian government found that it had to fight for what it wanted. This was demonstrated by what happened to the 7th division in 1942. Churchill later described this incident as 'a painful episode in our relations with the Australian Government'.⁵⁹ Wavell suggested on 16 February that either the 6th or 7th division be sent to Burma. At the Pacific War Council meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at Washington on 18 February the situation in the Far East was discussed.⁶⁰ It was accepted that Australia should bring the 6th and 7th divisions to the Pacific. Because Singapore had fallen the Australian government was to be asked if the 7th division would instead be diverted to Burma, to save Rangoon and keep the Burma road and communications with China open. This was because the 7th division was close enough to be diverted to Burma while the 6th division had not yet left the Middle East. Bruce in London told Curtin that he believed that the 7th

⁵⁸ Robertson, *Australia at War*, p 79.

⁵⁹ Churchill, *The Hinge of Fate*, p 136.

⁶⁰ Page to Curtin; 28 February 1942, *DAFP V*, Doc 341.

division should be diverted to Burma.⁶¹ However, Curtin responded to Churchill on 19 February saying that he could not allow the 7th division to be diverted to Burma.

Churchill tried to pressure Curtin about this. Cranborne, on the advice of General Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, offered the Australian government a United States division to leave for Australia in March if the 7th division went to Burma. Churchill pleaded with Curtin to reconsider the situation. He referred to the telegram in which Curtin had said that the evacuation of Singapore would be an 'inexcusable betrayal', noting that the 7th division had the opportunity to avert a 'vital war emergency'.⁶² Churchill continued that if Australia persisted in refusing, then 'a very grave effect will be produced upon the President and the Washington circle on whom you are so largely dependent.'⁶³ The following day Churchill sent a telegram to Curtin that he had received from Roosevelt. Roosevelt regarded the diversion of the 7th division to Burma as being of the 'utmost importance'.⁶⁴ Roosevelt also sent a message to Curtin through Casey in Washington, again stressing the importance of Burma.⁶⁵ Evatt felt that Churchill was applying excessive pressure upon the Australian government to change its decision: 'Churchill seems to have a deep hatred of labour governments and a resentment of independent judgement which make it almost impossible for us to work with him.'⁶⁶ As if to confirm Evatt's worst fears, Churchill sent a cable to Curtin that day admitting that on the 20th he had already ordered the ships with the 7th division AIF convoy to Burma without prior Australian permission. This diversion was made on the assumption that Curtin would agree to the diversion.⁶⁷ Curtin was outraged as was Bruce, who immediately cabled Curtin with his reactions: 'I am appalled by it and its possible repercussions. It is arrogant and offensive and it contradicts the assurances given to Page that the Convoy was not being diverted from its direct route to Australia.' Although he felt that 'Any reaction on your part would be justified', he nevertheless urged restraint.⁶⁸ Curtin replied to Churchill that it was 'quite impossible to reverse a decision which was made with the utmost care and

⁶¹ Bruce to Curtin; 18 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 344.

⁶² Attlee to Curtin; 20 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 352.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ British Dominions Office to Curtin; 21 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 353.

⁶⁵ Casey to Curtin; 21 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 355.

⁶⁶ Evatt to Stirling; 22 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 360.

⁶⁷ Attlee to Curtin 22 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 362.

⁶⁸ Bruce to Curtin, 23 February 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 364.

which we have affirmed and re-affirmed'. Curtin demanded that the convoy go to Colombo to refuel and then return to Australia. This, however, was not the end of the matter. Curtin was informed by Page and Bruce that Churchill wanted the 7th division to be diverted to Ceylon. The Australian government offered to divert two brigades of the 6th division to Ceylon, whilst insisting that the 7th division return to Australia.

Australia and New Zealand took different approaches to ensure that their voices were heard in London and Washington. The New Zealand government was more tactful and restrained while the Australian government was more forthright and defiant. Berendsen recalled that Australia's approach to foreign affairs was 'from time to time ... like a bull at a gate, with little thought or care for the consequences'.⁶⁹ Australia was determined to have a voice and to be heard by others and so adopted this distinctly outspoken approach. Which approach was more successful, the tactful New Zealand approach or the more forthright Australian approach? More was gained from Britain and the United States by loudly pestering them, then by making polite requests. Evatt's diplomatic style illustrates this point particularly well. He would loudly make an unrealistically ambitious request that he knew Britain or the United States would not seriously consider. Then in private, he would moderate his claim, prepared to settle for far less than he publicly claimed. Carl Bridge accurately observes that 'Roosevelt and Churchill soon discovered Evatt's games and, to humour Australia at little cost to themselves, connived to give him token trophies to take back to his party and electorate and to allow him to claim more influence on grand strategy than he ever had.'⁷⁰ As far as Australia was concerned Britain was no longer the Imperial power that it once was, and consequently little value was placed upon securing influence with the British. Instead, its focus was upon influencing the United States. Although Australia only gained 'token trophies', they were of great political value for demonstrating to the people that the government was achieving results. Achieving very little was better than achieving nothing.

This fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 shocked both Australia and New Zealand. Thousands of Australians and Britain's 18th division were incarcerated in Changi

⁶⁹ Berendsen's *Memoirs*, book four, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington) p 284.

⁷⁰ C. Bridge, 'Impossible Missions: H.V. Evatt in Washington and London in 1942 and 1943', in D. Day (Ed), *Brave New World: Dr H.V. Evatt and Australian foreign policy*, (St Lucia, 1996) p 32.

prison. Curtin said on 16 February that 'The fall of Singapore opens the Battle for Australia'.⁷¹ Darwin was bombed for the first time on 19 February. It was the single greatest air raid since the attack on Pearl Harbor with 100 Japanese planes. That afternoon there was a great rush southwards to the Adelaide River. Darwin was left a ghost town. Many RAAF men deserted their stations. Further raids followed on 4 March, 16 March, 19 March, 22 March, 2 April, 4 April and 5 April. By February 1942 about 2500 civilians had left Darwin.

There was much fear in political circles in Canberra. Typists were copying important documents in case the capital had to be moved in a hurry and the files had to be destroyed. Records show that officials in Canberra expected the capital to be bombed and even occupied. The Advisory War Council on 18 February 1942 considered a scorched earth policy for the whole of Australia. There was much panic in Australia's political circles from February 1942. Cecil Brown, a journalist from Colombia Broadcasting system, wrote that Forde was 'one of the most incredible men I have ever encountered in political life In his office in Parliament House he acted as harassed as if a Japanese division were chasing him. His manner was to keep saying "Yes, yes, yes", whether you were saying anything or not.'⁷² Curtin became ill and Evatt took another opportunity to draft telegrams to Churchill. On 23 March 1942 Evatt told Bruce that the 'position in Australia for the next two months is a desperate one.'⁷³

The public was scared. People had believed that their security rested with Singapore and the Royal Navy and they had seen both destroyed in the Pacific. Curtin said to the public on 16 February that the nation must now work as it never had done before. 'On what we do now depends everything we may like to do when this bloody test has been survived.'⁷⁴ On 31 March, W.S. Robinson, a leading Australian businessman, said that the country may 'have only six weeks to live.'⁷⁵

⁷¹ Robertson, *Australia at War*, p 93.

⁷² Quoted in Horner, *High Command*, p 161.

⁷³ Quoted in Robertson, *Australia at War*, p 99.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Hasluck, *Govt & People*, vol 2, p 73.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Robinson, *Australia at War*, p 99.

In the wider arena it was significant that the Australian and New Zealand governments were drawn together by the common threat of the advancing Japanese forces especially after the fall of Singapore. Fraser suggested to Curtin on 18 February that a New Zealand delegation should be sent to Australia to discuss immediate defence and supply problems. Curtin agreed. The New Zealand delegation consisted of Dan Sullivan, Minister of Supply, and Coates, who was a member of the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff. The most pressing concern was that the advance of Japanese forces meant that Australia and New Zealand feared that they faced invasion. Darwin, Port Moresby, New Caledonia and Fiji were immediately threatened. Protecting communications between Australasia and the United States was considered vital. Australia and New Zealand wanted the United States to play a greater role in the Pacific and they felt that the Anzac Command needed to be enlarged immediately. Achieving these goals was the focus of the consultation that took place in Australia between members of the Advisory War Council, the Australian Chiefs of Staff, the New Zealand delegation (including the Chiefs of Staff), Lieutenant-General Brett, the Deputy Supreme Commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, and Brigadier-General Hurley from the United States Army. The result of this consultation was that a telegram was drafted on 1 March to be sent to Churchill and Roosevelt recommending widening the Anzac Area to include the mainland of Australia, New Zealand, Timor, Ambon, New Guinea and the seas south of Australia. An Anzac Council was sought with government representatives from the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand. This council would meet in Washington and be responsible for the Anzac Area and could be enlarged if other countries had forces serving in this strategic area. The Anzac Council would come under the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington. However, when the Combined Chiefs of Staff discussed Anzac strategy naval, army and air officers should be present from Australia and New Zealand. A supreme commander would be appointed to the Anzac Area who would be responsible to the United States Chiefs of Staff Committee. This commander would have control over naval, air and land forces in the Anzac Area. It was felt that an Anzac Council was essential as it provided Australia and New Zealand with a voice in the higher direction of the war. This draft telegram concluded by suggesting General Brett as an acceptable candidate for supreme commander. The approval of the New Zealand government was urgently needed before the telegram could be sent.

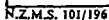
The New Zealand government replied on 3 March with a number of suggestions. While agreeing in general terms with the scope of the telegram it felt that certain aspects of it had to be clarified. It was assumed that the Anzac Council would not replace the Far Eastern Defence Council in London. Fraser felt that, although the Far Eastern Defence Council in London was not ideal, both Australia and New Zealand had agreed to it and they were obliged to try to make it work. He also foresaw some awkwardness if the Anzac Council and the London Council held contradictory views. Nevertheless, he welcomed closer relations with the United States through the proposed Anzac Council, so long as it was not at the expense of the London Council. Fraser also felt that the Dutch should be included on the Anzac Council as they had forces in the Area. The New Zealand government also suggested that the proposed telegram should not be communicated directly to Roosevelt. Instead it should be sent to Churchill with the request that he pass it on to Roosevelt. All the suggestions that the New Zealand government made were accepted by the Australians.

The amended telegram was sent by Curtin on 4 March to Clement Attlee, the Secretary of State for Dominions Affairs.⁷⁶ Fraser also sent a telegram two days later confirming that the New Zealand government fully supported Curtin's plans for the Anzac Area. Churchill replied on 7 March that he had passed on the telegram to Roosevelt and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were in London, were examining Australia's and New Zealand's proposals. The Tasman neighbours combined their influence to try to get the United States to play a greater role in the Anzac Command.

The United States took control of the situation. Roosevelt, on 13 March 1942, approved a proposal that the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff should divide the world into three areas: Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific. Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff would concentrate on the battles in Europe, Roosevelt and the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pacific and both would share oversight in the Middle East. The Pacific was divided into three areas: the Pacific Ocean Area, the Southwest Pacific Area and the Southeast Pacific Area.⁷⁷ In this division Australia found itself in the Southwest Pacific Area and New Zealand in the Pacific Ocean Area. The Pacific Ocean Area was divided into

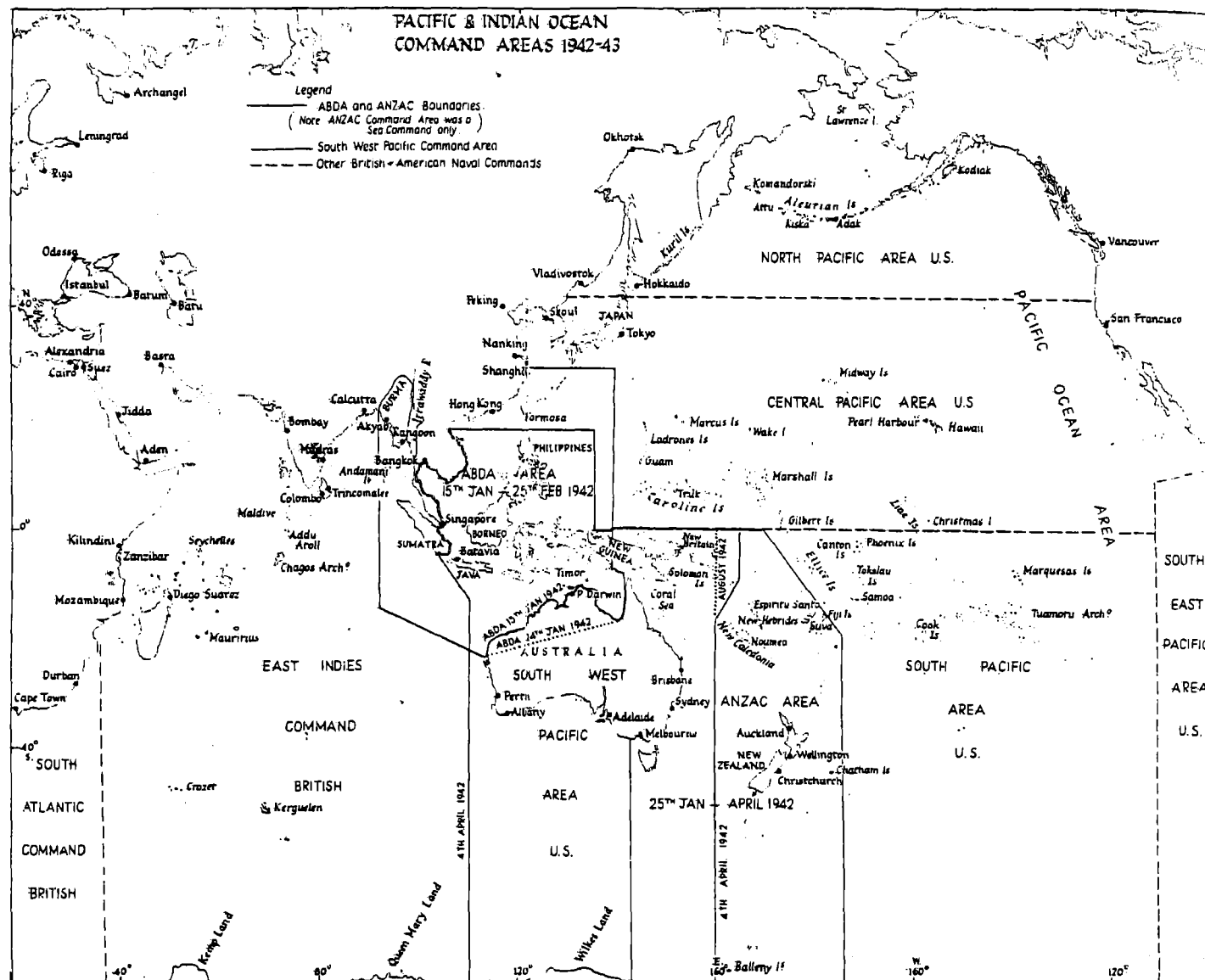
⁷⁶ Curtin to Attlee; 4 March 1942, *Documents III*, Doc 151.

⁷⁷ Lissington, *NZ & US*, p 46.



MAP II

Drawn by Lands & Survey Dept., N.Z.



PACIFIC & INDIAN OCEAN COMMAND AREAS, 1942-1943⁹⁹

three smaller commands: north, central and south. New Zealand was in the South Pacific Ocean Area which also included Fiji and New Caledonia. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz was later confirmed as Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Area. These new commands replaced the Anzac Command. The Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Area was responsible to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. General Douglas MacArthur was Commander-in-Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area.

Despite all the suggestions that Australia and New Zealand had made about the command in the Pacific, the United States did as it pleased. Fraser supported the fact that the United States had acted quickly saying that it was important not to waste valuable time arguing about the finer points of strategy. Then Fraser added, somewhat inconsistently, that his government expected to be consulted about anything that might affect New Zealand.

The New Zealand government was strongly opposed to being separated from Australia strategically. Fraser felt that the separation of Australia and New Zealand into separate strategic areas would create numerous practical difficulties. He wanted the proposed Anzac Area to be established and if this was not possible, that Australia and New Zealand would not be separated into different strategic commands. It is significant that the Australian government did not express this degree of concern about being detached from New Zealand. However New Zealand's protests to the United States achieved nothing. The American leaders refused to allow their hands to be tied.

The Australian and New Zealand governments' dissatisfaction with the Far Eastern Defence Council in London led to the establishment of the Pacific War Council (PWC) in Washington. Although both countries had agreed to attend the Far Eastern Council, it was not seen as ideal and the meetings were of little consequence. The collapse of the ABDA Command in February and continued trans-Tasman discontent with the Far Eastern Defence Council in London led Roosevelt to reconsider the situation. Although Roosevelt was not keen to broaden allied consultation he told a Washington Press Conference on 30 March 1942 that a council 'with a fancy name' could be established 'if it would make anybody

happy'.⁸⁰ Much to the delight of the Australian and New Zealand governments, Roosevelt announced on 30 March his decision to establish the PWC that would meet in Washington with its first meeting on 1 April. It included representatives from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada and China. Roosevelt was Chairman.

Australia and New Zealand had finally achieved what they had been striving for: a voice in Washington. Better still, they had direct access to Roosevelt. What then did this actually amount to? The PWC was not an executive body but an advisory one. It was set up by Roosevelt and suited his purposes. It had no secretariat, no formal executive powers, no official minutes, no formal records and no agenda. The meetings were personally dominated by Roosevelt in a casual conversational way. It was not designed to give the Australian and New Zealand governments any decision-making powers, but as a means of making them feel consulted. It provided a mechanism that Roosevelt used to appease Australia and New Zealand. Lord Halifax described the PWC as 'merely a facade'.⁸¹ The United States Chiefs of Staff tolerated the PWC because they saw it being used to encourage the Australian and New Zealand governments to 'let off steam, but not ... in any way that would affect the United States in its military decisions.'⁸² Roosevelt described his motives for the PWC to Winant, the United States Ambassador to Britain: 'my own Pacific War Council serves primarily to disseminate information as to the progress of operations in the Pacific - and secondly to give me a chance to keep everybody happy by telling stories and doing most of the talking.'⁸³ In this respect it was a useful innovation.

Although Australia and New Zealand gained a voice in Washington and direct access to Roosevelt, their influence upon the higher strategy of the war in the Pacific remained at best token. Australia had achieved more than New Zealand through its forceful and persistently loud approach. For example, the 7th division was not diverted to Burma. The establishment of the Anzac Area and the Pacific War Council can also be seen as token successes for Australia and New Zealand. In real terms Australia and New Zealand had at best a minor influence upon Britain and the United States. This was because both

⁸⁰ Quoted in Bell, *Unequal Allies*, p 60.

⁸¹ Quoted in R.H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan*, (New York, 1985) p 143.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Quoted in Kimball, 'Merely a Facade? Roosevelt and the Southwest Pacific', in Day (Ed) *Brave New World*, p 14.

Britain and the United States, as large powers, were reluctant to spend time consulting two small dominions in the Southwest Pacific when their valuable time could be spent on winning the Second World War.

Chapter 5

The Crisis point of trans-Tasman relations: divergent policies from November 1942 to June 1943.

Australia's and New Zealand's attempts to secure a voice in Washington, demonstrated the different diplomatic styles of the two countries. This was not the only respect in which they were different. The year 1942 had brought great changes for both countries. The Australian government had accepted that the power of the Empire-Commonwealth had expired and that Australia's future lay with the United States. Consequently, Anglo-Australian relations had soured. New Zealand, while realising that the United States was now the 'great power', still clung emotionally to Britain. New Zealand's foreign policy still seemed to be operating partly within the old imperial system. The changing ways in which the Australian and New Zealand governments saw the world affected the way that they related to Britain and the United States. Consequently, Australia and New Zealand began to follow different policies especially with respect to their expeditionary forces. These divergences resulted in a crisis in trans-Tasman relations. Ironically, it was deteriorating political relations between Australia and New Zealand that led Fraser to send a High Commissioner to Canberra.

When the Australian government recalled the 6th and 7th divisions from the Mediterranean Theatre it intended to recall the 9th division at a later date. However, securing the return of the 9th division to the Pacific theatre proved to be a lengthy and arduous process which the Australian government believed New Zealand came close to jeopardising. As early as 14 April 1942 the Australia government had requested that the 9th division return but agreed to postpone its journey until shipping could be supplied.¹ Three months later, on 30 July, Churchill pleaded with Curtin and succeeded in securing his agreement to postpone again the return of the 9th division.² In October, Australia once more pressed Churchill to help the 9th division withdraw from the Mediterranean. It seemed that Australia had finally got its way on the 23rd when Churchill told General

¹ Curtin to Churchill, 14 April 1942, *DAFP V*, Doc 465.

² Curtin to Churchill, 30 July 1942, *DAFP VI*, Doc 12.

Alexander that the 9th division was to withdraw.³ However, the issue was not yet resolved. Alexander received Churchill's instructions on the eve of the Allied offensive led by Montgomery against Rommel at El Alamein- an offensive in which the 9th division was intended to play a crucial role. Withdrawing the 9th division at this late stage would have caused cancellation of the whole operation. For a third time Curtin was asked to postpone the withdrawal. He agreed and the 9th division took part in the battle of El Alamein. Roosevelt on 1 November offered to transfer a United States division from Hawaii to Australia to allow the 9th division to remain in the Middle East.⁴ Evatt insisted to Roosevelt⁵ on 16 November that Australia was plagued with manpower problems and could not maintain the 9th division in the Middle East. After these seemingly countless efforts by Australia to secure the return of the 9th division, the New Zealand government raised its desire that its own 2nd division be returned. Fraser asked Churchill on 19 November. The timing of Fraser's request infuriated the Australian government which feared that it would delay or stop the return of the 9th division. Australia's less than favourable position had been, as Curtin saw it, complicated by New Zealand's action. Curtin was highly incensed. He told Bruce in London, in a strongly worded telegram, that New Zealand's request must not be allowed to prejudice or delay the return of the 9th division.⁶ The Australian government undoubtedly felt that it deserved to receive priority over New Zealand because it had asked to leave first. On 2 December, Churchill instructed that the 9th division be withdrawn. It left the Middle East in January 1943 reaching Fremantle on 7 February.

The New Zealand government had been considering withdrawing the 2nd division for some time before it made the request to Churchill. New Zealand had two divisions in the field, the 2nd division in the Middle East and the 3rd division in the Pacific.⁷ Maintaining two full divisions as well as supplying the demands of industry put strains upon New Zealand's manpower resources. New Zealand's primary sector was already strained by the demands of war and this was increased by the presence of United States Marines who arrived in Wellington on 14 June 1942. The pressures of industry were increasing as New Zealand supplied food to Britain and to the United States forces in the South Pacific.

³ *Ibid*, p 139n.

⁴ Roosevelt to Curtin, received 1 November 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 68.

⁵ Evatt via Dixon to Roosevelt, 16 November 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 76.

⁶ *Ibid*, p172n & 174n.

⁷ The 3rd division was technically born on 14 May 1942. Before this it was referred to as B Force 2 NZEF.

Because of these considerable manpower shortages the New Zealand government considered withdrawing the 2nd division to relieve the pressure. On 14 November 1942 Attlee cabled Batterbee in Wellington that Britain wanted the 2nd division to remain in the Middle East. Fraser told Churchill on 19 November that New Zealand wished to withdraw its division from the Middle East, saying that it had declined mentioning this earlier because of the military situation there. Fraser argued that because of the increase in British and United States forces after Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of French North Africa on 8 November, New Zealand's forces in the Middle East were of 'diminishing importance'.⁸ The New Zealand government was also embarrassed by the United States' requests for increased troops in the Pacific.⁹

Fraser used Australia's position to further New Zealand's case for the return of its troops. He said that his government would face irresistible pressure 'should it become known that all three Australian Divisions have returned.'¹⁰ This was just the sort of argument that the Australian government so feared. Churchill replied to Fraser's request that he would 'very much regret to see the New Zealand Division quit the scene of its glories' but he understood 'how embarrassing' the withdrawal of the 9th Australian division would be for New Zealand.¹¹

In a secret session of the New Zealand House of Representatives (on 3 December) it was unanimously decided to leave the 2nd division in the Mediterranean East for the time being. In an open session of parliament on 4 December Fraser, although he fully agreed with the decision to leave the 2nd division in the Middle East, said he did 'not believe in the theory of a holding war in the Pacific'.¹² This comment reveals the difficulty of the decision that the New Zealand government had faced. It felt torn between the Mediterranean and the Pacific and decided to maintain both divisions for the time being. In effect New Zealand had decided to postpone the decision. Sidney Holland, leader of the Opposition, commented on the improved situation in the Pacific in the last twelve months. Twelve months earlier Japan had entered the war and its armed forces had advanced rapidly through

⁸ Fraser to Churchill, 19 November 1942, *DNZER I*, Doc 7.

⁹ Attlee to Batterbee, 14 November 1942, *Documents II*, Doc 175.

¹⁰ Fraser to Churchill, 19 November 1942, *Documents I*, Doc 7.

¹¹ Churchill to Fraser, 24 November 1942, *Ibid*, Doc 8.

¹² *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates [NZPD]*, vol 261, p 952.

Asia and the Pacific causing widespread concern. The Japanese onslaught continued unchecked until the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway in May and June 1942. Sidney George Holland, Leader of the Opposition, then turned to New Zealand's manpower shortage and claimed that it was not possible to maintain two full divisions overseas as well as the home forces stationed in the country and a large workforce devoted to food production. He said New Zealand's manpower was overcommitted because Parliament had no say in the decision to send the 3rd division to the Pacific earlier in the year. He said 'The War Cabinet has done it. Parliament has not done it - Parliament never does.'¹³ Holland resented the War Cabinet's increase of New Zealand's commitments without consulting parliament first. His attitude reflected the fact that he had had the opportunity to become a member of the War Cabinet on 17 April 1941, but had declined Fraser's offer. Holland was using this issue to earn some political points against the government. This was evident as he did not say which division he wanted to be returned to New Zealand. Instead he was inclined to say that New Zealand's home forces should be reduced and a complete overhaul of the defence forces should be made. In response to Holland's plea that Parliament be consulted before any more commitments were made, Fraser made a pledge to the House that 'provided there is plenty of time to consult Parliament, this will be done'.¹⁴ This meant that when the future of the 2nd division was later considered Parliament expected to play an active role in making this decision. The decision to leave the 2nd division in the Mediterranean was communicated to Churchill and Curtin on 4 December 1942. Although the New Zealand government did not jeopardise the return of the 9th division this was not immediately apparent, especially to Curtin. Later, on 14 December 1942, after the issue was resolved, Curtin sent Fraser a friendly telegram saying that New Zealand and Australia had similar defence and foreign policy interests and there was no reason why they could not present a united front against Japan.

After this political tension between the Australian and New Zealand governments, Fraser felt that the time had come to extend diplomatic representation between the countries. He sent a telegram to Curtin on 20 February 1943 requesting that Australia accept a New Zealand High Commissioner to Canberra, naming Carl Berendsen as the man he wished to send. He also encouraged the Australian government to send a High

¹³ *Ibid*, p 957.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 974.

Commissioner to Wellington. Curtin replied on 23 February that Australia would receive Berendsen as High Commissioner to Canberra. Berendsen later recalled that there had been some reluctance by Curtin to receive any High Commissioner from New Zealand. The Australian government was concerned that having a High Commissioner in Canberra would mean that it would be obliged to consult with New Zealand. It meant that a New Zealand representative would have the opportunity constantly to press its views upon an indifferent Australian government. As the Australian government did not regard New Zealand as an equal partner, it felt no need to consult with New Zealand. When the Australian government wanted something from New Zealand it could send a relevant telegram to Wellington. Curtin regarded the presence of a New Zealand High Commissioner as nothing but a nuisance. He told Fraser that Australia had not considered sending a High Commissioner to New Zealand and had no desire to do so at present. He did not wish to send an Australian to Wellington only to be constantly badgered by New Zealanders.

This was not the first time that Australia and New Zealand had considered exchanging diplomatic representatives. As early as 5 September 1939, Menzies had announced that his Cabinet wanted to make a reciprocal exchange of High Commissioners with New Zealand. However, nothing came of this. When Fraser had visited Australia in May 1941 the exchange of High commissioners was again discussed. Although there is no formal record of these discussions, both Fraser and Curtin recalled these oral discussions.¹⁵ Fraser had been considering the exchange of High Commissioners with Australia for some time prior to his formal request to Curtin in February 1943. Why then did he choose to raise the issue again at this time? One reason is that from a military point of view increased trans-Tasman co-operation was needed. From March 1942 onwards New Zealand and Australia had been in different war commands. Australia was part of the Southwest Pacific Area under General MacArthur and New Zealand was part of the South Pacific Ocean Area command under Admiral Halsey. New Zealand's forces were under the command of Halsey and Australia's forces were under the command of MacArthur: New Zealand was in a naval command, Australia in an army command. Because of these different war zones, although New Zealand and Australia had similar defence and foreign policy problems, they had little contact with each other. The emergence of different policies also hindered the progress of

¹⁵ *DAFP VI*, Doc 122 & 124.

stable relations between both countries. Fraser told Nash in Washington, that he had been concerned about liaison with Australia for some time. He wrote that there was a need for 'fuller mutual understanding of the defence and foreign policies'¹⁶ of the Tasman neighbours.

Another reason for extending diplomatic representation to Australia was to lessen the adverse effects of the political falling-outs between the countries. In late November 1942, Curtin was furious that the New Zealand government had asked for its 2nd division to be returned. Now that the Australian 9th division was in the Pacific, the Australian government was furious that New Zealand's 2nd division remained in the Mediterranean theatre. New Zealand's position, Curtin now felt, was to fight along side Australia in the Pacific.

However, it is extremely controversial to claim that the return of the 9th division was in any way vital to the outcome of the war in the Pacific. It is even more controversial to claim that Australia's manpower shortages necessitated the return of the 9th division. The 9th division arrived in Australia in February 1943 where the men were given 21 days leave. It was concentrated in the Atherton area in Queensland where it was re-equipped and reorganised as a jungle division. It then fought in the New Guinea campaign from September 1943. Although the 9th division was used in the Pacific war, it would be inaccurate to claim that it was necessary to withdraw it from the Mediterranean Theatre because Australia did not have forces available to go into combat in New Guinea. This was evident in October 1943 when the War Cabinet directed that 15 000 experienced rural workers should be released from the armed services and from munitions and aircraft industries.

Fraser realised that New Zealand's manpower problem of November 1942 had not been resolved, just delayed. It was certain that a decision would have to be made soon regarding the future of the 2nd division in the Mediterranean theatre. If this future decision would upset Curtin and the Australian government, it would be to New Zealand's advantage to have a High Commissioner to lessen any adverse effects of such a decision.

¹⁶ Fraser to Nash, 25 February 1943, *Appointment of a High Commissioner (National Archives)*.

Berendsen later recalled that it was 'primarily because of the apparent divergence of Australian and New Zealand policies ... that the Australians were asked and with some reluctance agreed, to accept a New Zealand High Commissioner.'¹⁷ Fraser saw the appointment as an opportunity to smooth over past misunderstandings and to prepare for possible future ones regarding the 2nd division.

Carl Berendsen had been head of the Prime Minister's Department since 1932, the Secretary of External Affairs and acted as the Secretary of the War Cabinet. He was in effect a one man external affairs department before it was officially created. On 13 June 1943 he was officially appointed to be New Zealand's first High Commissioner to Canberra, but he had already arrived in March. His first task was to find accommodation that was suitable for the position that he held. He also had to set up an office. Just after he left for Canberra, the New Zealand Department of External Affairs was created.

Fraser had taken a long time to decide to send Berendsen to Australia. He first mentioned his intention to Berendsen over a year before the final decision was taken. In his memoirs Berendsen recorded that this may have been due to the traditional resentment that Labour politicians had for civil servants. Many in the Labour Party held the view that if Fraser was to appoint someone to Canberra it should be an elected Member of Parliament rather than a Civil Servant. Being elected by the people was seen as being democratic, honourable and prestigious. It was almost seen by some as a way of proving yourself. Fraser shared this belief that Members of Parliament always ranked higher than civil servants. This party pressure contributed to the length of time that it took for Fraser to decide to send Berendsen to Australia.

At first glance, it seems strange that a man in Berendsen's position of great responsibility would wish to leave Wellington for Canberra. Although it was undisputed that Berendsen was the best man for the job there were other reasons why he went. His working relationship with Fraser was increasingly strained. Fraser was an extremely able statesman but a monster of a man to work for. He worked long hours and expected those around him to do likewise. He continually and unnecessarily had a habit of being late, often

¹⁷ *Berendsen Memoirs*, p 299.

for trivial or petty reasons. Civil Servants complained of being urgently summoned to see him only to be kept waiting for hours. This also happened to senior military experts who were summoned to War Cabinet. They would wait for hours only to be sent away as their particular subject was not being discussed that day. If allowed, Fraser would bully others by ruthlessly cutting them down verbally. Berendsen was not a man to be bullied but he resented Fraser's lack of even the simplest of courtesies. Stevens later recalled simply that Berendsen 'couldn't get on with Fraser'.¹⁸ The tension between the two men was so great that McIntosh said he 'feared Berendsen might kill Fraser'.¹⁹ Fraser's attitude was that even the lowest back bencher ranked higher than the highest official and this may partly explain the strained relations between the two men. After being treated so well by Savage, Berendsen found that working for Fraser was a nightmare. Savage had disliked working at night and had kept predictable hours allowing the Berendsens to socialise with other dignitaries on a regular basis. In contrast, Fraser drove himself to the limits of physical endurance and in consequence Berendsen also. Alister Donald McIntosh had worked in the Prime Minister's Department since 1935 and became the Secretary of External Affairs soon after Berendsen left for Canberra. He said that because of the stress that Berendsen was under, his appointment to Australia 'was due as much to threatened imminent physical collapse through over-work' as to the need to have a New Zealand voice in Canberra.²⁰ The stress of his heavy work load combined with the pressures of war had meant that his health had suffered and he had developed an ulcer. As a consequence of the personal friction between Fraser and Berendsen and his failing health, he took up the post in Australia.

In April 1943 Churchill asked Fraser if the 2nd division could take part in the invasion of Sicily for which it would have to be withdrawn to be trained.²¹ However, because Fraser had told parliament that he would consult it before making further commitments on New Zealand's behalf, he was unable to give Churchill an immediate

¹⁸ *Henderson Interview with Major-General W.G. Stevens*, p15.

¹⁹ F. Corner, *In the Beginning ... Recollections From one 'Present at the Creation'*, p 3.

²⁰ A.D. McIntosh, 'The Origins of the Department of External Affairs and the Formulation of an Independent Foreign Policy', *New Zealand in World Affairs*, vol 1, p 18.

²¹ Fraser to Berendsen, 15 May 1943, *DNZER I*, Doc 19.

answer. McIntosh said that the decision ahead was so complex and intricate that Fraser was unable 'even to hint that Parliament might decide one way or the other.'²²

When the North Africa campaign ended on 13 May 1943 with the Axis defeat at Tunis the New Zealand government realised that the time had come to consider the future of the 2nd division. The decision was a delicate one directed by manpower shortages and influenced by internal politics. The New Zealand government could not maintain the manpower for two full divisions. Eventually it would have to withdraw one to reinforce the other. New Zealand's underlying strategy was that its troops should serve in the theatre where they could make the greatest contribution to the war as a whole. Churchill urged the New Zealand government to continue to maintain both divisions and said that if this was not possible the United States would provide assistance, implying that the priority should be in the Mediterranean.

However, the return of the Australian troops from the Middle East had an unsettling effect upon the New Zealand public. Fraser also realised that if New Zealand retained the 2nd division in the Mediterranean the Australian government may feel that 'we are taking our share of responsibilities in the Pacific too lightly.'²³ Curtin was told that the New Zealand government was about to make an extremely difficult decision and gave his advice. He strongly believed that the 2nd division should withdraw from the Mediterranean to reinforce the Pacific:

Basic strategy imposes upon Australia holding the Pacific until Hitler has been defeated. A holding war in the Pacific imposes prolonged attrition on Australia and New Zealand whose manpower resources already strained may well be exhausted before Hitler is defeated. Should this happen the failure would be disastrous in that the strategy would collapse and its collapse would be due to our failure to provide the role assigned to us.²⁴

Curtin believed that New Zealand's role was to hold Japan in the Pacific.

However, his analysis was over-dramatic. Curtin conveniently forgot to mention the important United States effort in the Pacific or the fact that the situation was not by any

²² McIntosh to Stevens, 14 May 1943, *McIntosh Papers*, STE 1/43/006.

²³ Fraser to Berendsen, 15 May 1943, *DNZER I*, Doc 19.

²⁴ Berendsen to Fraser, 17 May 1943, *Ibid*, Doc 21.

means as critical as it had been twelve to fifteen months ago when it was feared that Japan might invade Australia. The change of circumstances in the past twelve months had not been the result of Australia's bringing back its divisions back from the Middle East, although they undoubtedly did play an important role. It was because the United State's presence in the Pacific was strong enough to slow, halt and finally reverse the Japanese advance. Twelve months after Pearl Harbour, the 6th and 7th divisions had returned from the Mediterranean while the 9th division remained. The 7th division had been wholly committed to the New Guinea campaign where it had been severely depleted by those killed in action and by tropical diseases. The three brigades of the 6th division were deployed separately: the 16th brigade had been depleted in New Guinea, the 17th brigade was at Milne Bay and the 19th brigade formed the core of the Northern Territory Garrison in Australia. The return of the 6th and 7th divisions were justified in terms of the good use that they were put to. But it was the United State's efforts, not the return of the 6th and 7th divisions, that played the vital role in the war in the Pacific. This did not stop Curtin from pressuring Fraser to withdraw the 2nd division from the Mediterranean to reinforce the Pacific.

The general election of September 1943 had an influence upon the New Zealand government's decision about the 2nd division. This election had been put off for some time and was in the back of the politicians' minds when they faced this difficult decision in May. McIntosh said that until the country had gone to the polls 'we are not going to get any sense out of anybody.'²⁵ There was a danger that the House would divide on party lines on this issue and that the Opposition would use it as an election platform. The National Party and John A. Lee were keen to attack the Government's manpower policy and to insist upon the return of the 2nd division. However, if Fraser agreed to bring back the 2nd division the Opposition could then claim that Labour had let down Britain and use this as an election platform. Either way, Fraser was conscious of the political consequences of the decision ahead, especially when Holland was 'quite prepared to treat the matter as a political question.'²⁶ This was an extremely agonising decision for Fraser to have to make. McIntosh said that he was 'in a complete dither.'²⁷

²⁵ McIntosh to Berendsen, 22 April 1943, *McIntosh Papers*, AER, 1/43/009.

²⁶ McIntosh to Berendsen, 17 May 1943, *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

On 21 May a secret session of the House was held to decide the future of the 2nd division. Fraser had already discussed the issue with the War Cabinet first, then his domestic Cabinet, and then his caucus. Initially, the House was divided on the issue. Holland criticised Fraser for having consulted Curtin, saying 'he did not give two hoots for Australia'.²⁸ Fraser responded by defending Australia's courageous war effort. After much discussion the House decided to leave the 2nd division in the Mediterranean and to bring back 6 000 men of the first three echelons on furlough. The furlough scheme was a political sweetener offered to the public that eventually became a political nightmare. Fraser had created a Frankenstein. Over 6 000 men of the first three echelons of the 2nd division arrived in New Zealand in July 1943 for three months furlough. This was an unusual scheme whereby men were bought half way around the world for three months leave in the midst of the greatest world war. Their return to Europe after their leave was a hot issue which simmered and reached its climax in January 1944. Some of the men demanded that those from industry should return instead of themselves saying that it was unfair that they would serve twice while others not at all. There were some difficulties with this as the returned men were battle hardened trained soldiers while new recruits from industry would have little training and no experience. Despite this, the men succeeded in securing public sympathy courtesy of Holland's using the furlough grievance to gain support in the September 1943 election. The military issue became one that was riddled with politics. By January 1944, 430 of the 1660 liable to return had refused, demanding that those from industry take their turn. They were courtmartialled for desertion and dismissed from the Army.

That the decision to leave the 2nd division in the Mediterranean was almost unanimous was a tribute to Fraser's skill in leading the House through the debate. The logic behind the decision was that New Zealand could offer a greater contribution in the Mediterranean Theatre than in the Pacific one. Another factor contributing to New Zealand's decision to leave the 2nd division in the Mediterranean Theatre was the attitude of the United States. As usual, the New Zealand government had received little information about the opinion of the United States. However, Fraser realised that the United States

²⁸ A.D. McIntosh, 'Working with Peter Fraser in Wartime: Personal Reminiscences', *New Zealand Journal of History*, (Vol 10, 1976, p 13).

viewed the war in the Pacific as an American affair. This position was confirmed in early June when Rear-Admiral S.T. Wilkson, Halsey's deputy, met with New Zealand's War Cabinet. His opinion about what New Zealand's priorities in the Pacific should be, was that 'Air came first, Navy second, production third and Army fourth'.²⁹

When New Zealand informed Britain and Australia of its decision on 21 May, it could not have received more contrasting responses. Churchill replied that he and his colleagues were moved by New Zealand's 'loyalty and courage'.³⁰ Curtin and his advisers were disturbed by New Zealand's decision. A minute from Shedden to Curtin dated 26 May revealed the extent to which he believed that 'the New Zealand division in the Middle East should return to the Pacific to play its part in the war against Japan'.³¹ Shedden felt that Australia was being left to defend the Pacific without the help of the New Zealand armed forces. Again, he conveniently overlooked the role of the Americans in the Pacific War. Shedden recalled that in the previous November the New Zealand government had almost upset the return of the 9th division and that now Australia was faced with the 'spectacle' of a decision. He concluded 'either that New Zealand is less co-operative towards Australia than to the United Kingdom, notwithstanding our common interests in the Pacific, or they feel they are overshadowed by Australia and show up better by playing a lone hand, even if it is prejudicial to their vital interests'.³² Curtin was also upset by New Zealand's decision. He angrily replied to Fraser on 1 June that for every soldier New Zealand kept in the Mediterranean Theatre an American or an Australian would have to fill his place in the Pacific Theatre. This was a very strange telegram from Curtin because what he asserted was wrong. Australia played a secondary role to the United States in the Pacific War. It is true that Australian forces were fighting a long bloody battle in New Guinea and that the outcome of this was also important to New Zealand. However, the war was not by any means as desperate as it had been twelve months earlier. Australia was no longer threatened and did not face the prospect of invasion. Japanese naval strength had been destroyed at the battles of Coral Sea and Midway a year earlier. Therefore, Australia did not need New Zealand troops in the Pacific. This is why this strongly worded telegram

²⁹ Wood, *NZPW*, p 260.

³⁰ Churchill to Fraser, 26 May 1943, *Documents II*, Doc 241.

³¹ Shedden to Curtin, 26 May 1943, *DAFP VI*, Doc 198.

³² *Ibid.*

from Curtin left New Zealand officials stunned. McIntosh said that 'We took it very badly'.³³

Although Berendsen believed that the 2nd division should have returned to the Pacific, this did not make his dealings with Curtin any easier. His interview with Curtin immediately after New Zealand's decision had been difficult because the Australian Prime Minister had reacted so strongly. McIntosh expressed his sympathy to Berendsen for the position he was in, saying that he could not 'imagine any mission being more complicated by a sudden unfortunate stroke than yours'.³⁴ Berendsen had the following to say about Curtin's harshly worded telegram and its effects on trans-Tasman relations: 'We have certainly had a jolt - which probably broke nothing - and we shall have to go on quietly and carefully for awhile until we see how best we can arrange things.'³⁵

Curtin's reaction was dramatic and harsh. His strong reaction reveals his attitude towards New Zealand. He sent the telegram (1 June 1943) to try to reorientate the New Zealand government away from Britain's influence and towards the Pacific. It was an attempt by Curtin to make New Zealand follow Australia's lead in the war. Berendsen said that Curtin tended to look down upon New Zealand and upon Fraser. When the New Zealand government did not follow the Australian government, Curtin regarded New Zealand as a 'small and rather embarrassing member of the Commonwealth group, which should be put in its proper place.'³⁶

That Curtin was trying to get the New Zealand government to follow Australia's lead was blatantly evident when, after rebuking Fraser for leaving troops in the Middle East, he only nine days later, on 10 June, announced to the world that the threat to Australia had been lifted. Curtin said 'I do not think the enemy can now invade this country.'³⁷ Wellington was staggered by this about face. McIntosh's disbelief at Curtin's statement was conveyed to Berendsen on 16 June: 'Having taken this blow between the eyes, so to

³³ McIntosh to Berendsen, 16 June 1943, I. McGibbon, *Undiplomatic Dialogue: Letters between Carl Berendsen and Alister McIntosh 1943-1952*, (Auckland, 1993) p28.

³⁴ McIntosh to Berendsen, 17 June 1943, *Ibid*, p 31.

³⁵ Berendsen to McIntosh, 5 June 1943, *McIntosh Papers*, BER 1/43/018.

³⁶ *Berendsen Memoirs*, p 300.

³⁷ Hasluck, *Govt & People vol II*, vol II, p 218.

speak, we doubted whether we were seeing correctly when we read Mr Curtin's statement last week'³⁸. Curtin's earlier reaction was now seen by New Zealand officials as unreasonable. McIntosh was stunned. He said that the Australians were 'perfectly content to lead one up the garden path and then, without the slightest warning, to dash off in any direction, leaving one groping, bewildered and lost in darkness'.³⁹ There were bitter feelings in New Zealand's official and political circles after Curtin's statement. This was reflected in a letter McIntosh wrote to Berendsen on 17 June when he said that 'New Zealand had nothing to gain by teaming up with Australia either in the old Anzac Command, or for that matter, in any other enterprise'. He continued that New Zealand would be better to work alone without Australia. He then asked a perhaps sympathetic Berendsen 'has there ever been a time in your experience when we have attempted to collaborate with the Australians that we have not had just cause for complaint?'⁴⁰ Relations were soured on both sides of the Tasman by New Zealand's decision and Australia's reaction.

Berendsen had reported earlier on 17 May that Curtin was reluctant to export war materials to New Zealand while its main effort was in the Mediterranean theatre. It did not wish to see war materials leave the Pacific Theatre for another theatre of war. The New Zealand government felt that Curtin was unjustified in this complaint saying that the majority of what Australia exported to New Zealand remained in the Pacific. New Zealand exported some goods to the Eastern Supply Group, a supply council of all British territories south or east of the Mediterranean Theatre which sat in Delhi from March 1941. This council was responsible for planning and co-ordination of supply and it is reasonable to suppose that what New Zealand sent there was used in the war against Japan. Despite this, the Australian government was still suspicious of New Zealand's requests for imports.

The Australian and New Zealand governments saw the war in different ways and this explains Curtin's strong reactions to New Zealand's decision about the 2nd division. New Zealand saw the war in global terms; as one war with many overlapping campaigns. What happened in one theatre could vitally affect other theatres of the war and the overall outcome of the world war. In contrast, Berendsen informed McIntosh of Curtin's approach

³⁸ McIntosh to Berendsen, 16 June 1943, *McIntosh Papers*, BER 1/43/021.

³⁹ McIntosh to Berendsen, 17 June 1943, *Ibid*, BER1/43/022.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*.

to the war: 'As Mr Curtin sees it ... we have, if not two separate wars, certainly two separate campaigns against different enemies. One is close at home and one is far distant.'⁴¹ Although Curtin would agree with New Zealand that it should place its forces at the place where they would be most useful, he disagreed that this place was in the Mediterranean. He felt that it was imperative that Australia and New Zealand co-operate with the United States, in pushing back the Japanese armed forces. These different outlooks led to the different policies regarding the positioning of each country's armed forces. Australia felt that it was imperative that its forces be used in the Pacific. New Zealand's underlying strategy was that its best contribution was in the decisive theatre, and it agreed with the British and American governments that this theatre was the Mediterranean.

Berendsen's time in Australia was not particularly fruitful. He later recorded that he failed to achieve effective liaison between the New Zealand and Australian war machines. Admittedly he was thrown into Australia at a difficult time, but he did encounter opposition as the following incident demonstrates. In preparation for Anzac Day ceremonies in 1943 Berendsen was concerned that New Zealand, which had fought alongside Australia at Gallipoli, would be virtually invisible at the planned commemorations in Australia. Berendsen's attempts to achieve a New Zealand presence were met with resistance by Australian officials. The level of resistance encountered caused Berendsen to threaten to resign from his post and return to New Zealand. Fraser supported Berendsen in this stand. After much persistence by Berendsen, a New Zealand wreath was laid alongside the Australian one in the Anzac Day commemorations.

The different policies pursued by the two countries were complicated further by strained personal relations. Berendsen later recorded that he disliked Curtin and Curtin disliked him. He later recalled 'I cannot say that I look back with any pleasure on my relations with John Curtin.'⁴² There were other forces at work which may help explain the soured relations between Curtin and Berendsen. MacArthur, the newly appointed Commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, arrived in Australia to a hero's welcome on 17 March 1942. After his dramatic escape from the Philippines he arrived in Australia raising the hopes of the people and the morale of a depressed government. Curtin was won over

⁴¹, Berendsen to McIntosh, 5 June 1943, McGibbon, *Undiplomatic Dialogue*, p25.

⁴² *Berendsen Memoirs*, p 305.

by MacArthur's theatrical exuberances and overriding self confidence. MacArthur was an egotistical man who surrounded himself with 'yes men' and expected devout loyalty from them. In time, Curtin came to resemble one of MacArthur's followers. MacArthur, in an army command, did not get on with Admiral Nimitz of the United States Navy and had only contempt for those under Nimitz such as Ghormley and subsequently Halsey. Consequently, Curtin who 'was in some way hypnotized by MacArthur'⁴³ seemed to take aboard MacArthur's dislike for the naval command and expressing it by disliking the commanders in the naval commands. He extended his dislike to New Zealand and its politicians which were in this command. This helps explain Curtin's coolness towards Berendsen.

After his unpleasant experiences in Canberra, Berendsen reflected rather cynically in his Memoirs about the calibre of Australian and New Zealand politicians: 'I must express my conviction that with conspicuous exceptions our own New Zealand politicians are rather below the average politician elsewhere - except in Australia, where the standard falls very low indeed.'⁴⁴ This comment can only be understood in the light of Berendsen's experiences with both Fraser and Curtin, whilst remembering that his personal relations with both were extremely difficult.

Relations between the Australian and New Zealand governments from November 1942 to June 1943 were at best strained, and at worst in crisis. McIntosh once said that 'the history of relations between the two countries is one of the two countries making an agreement, then Australia getting ready to double-cross New Zealand, but then New Zealand getting in first.'⁴⁵ The sentiment expressed in this comment accurately reflected the state of trans-Tasman relations in this period. They were reluctant, awkward and at times down right frustrating. The strained trans-Tasman relations were caused by the Australian and New Zealand governments following different policies, and making different decisions about their expeditionary forces. This was because New Zealand was still partly under the 'imperial influence' of Britain, while Australia had made significant moves towards self-assertion and alliance with the United States.

⁴³ *Henderson Interview with Berendsen*, p 20.

⁴⁴ *Berendsen Memoirs*, p 3.

⁴⁵ *Corner, In the Beginning*, p 14.

Chapter 6

The Australian-New Zealand Agreement (the Canberra Pact)

After the political and diplomatic spats that had characterised recent trans-Tasman relations, the Tasman neighbours wanted to make amends. This process was helped by a new apparent uncomfortable outside influence that Australia and New Zealand faced. Ironically, this challenge came from the United States, which had been the Tasman neighbours 'saviour' in the dark days of 1942. From mid 1943 the Australian and New Zealand governments felt decidedly uncomfortable by the United States infiltration into the Pacific.

The Australian-New Zealand Agreement was largely the result of the efforts of Evatt. At face value it was an attempt to achieve Australian-New Zealand co-operation. Although, on one level this is correct, it was more an attempt by Evatt to pool the support of New Zealand with Australia's own, to influence the United States. This was because Evatt and the Australian government felt threatened by the United States intentions in the Pacific. This uncomfortable outside influence united the Australian and New Zealand governments. On 14 October 1943 Evatt gave a speech to Parliament where he put forward his views on foreign affairs and his aspirations for Australia's role in the world. He said that Australia had an 'undoubted' right to take part in all post-war discussions and settlements. This was because twice Australia had gone to war because of the situation in Europe. Evatt insisted, though, that the Pacific should be Australia's dominant focus. He said that in the Pacific 'Australia has a leading part to play'.¹ Specifically, he announced his intention to 'take steps to obtain a frank exchange of views between accredited representatives of the various governments interested in the South Pacific'.² Evatt mentioned the importance of trans-Tasman relations. As an indication of this, was the recently appointed New Zealand High Commissioner in Canberra and Australia wanted to make a reciprocal appointment as soon as possible. He said that together Australia and New Zealand were a powerful force in the Western Pacific and that they would have heavy

¹ Evatt's speech on International Affairs to the House of Representatives; 14 October 1943; *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*; vol 176; p 572.

² *Ibid*, p 575.

responsibilities there: 'I regard permanent collaboration between Australia and New Zealand as pivotal to a sound post-war Pacific policy.'³

Evatt's thinking at this time was far more visionary than his speech indicated. J.W. Burton, Secretary of the Political Section of the Department of External Affairs and Evatt's private secretary when he was overseas in 1943, was well aware of his thinking. In a memo to Lieutenant-Colonel William Hodgson, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, on 13 October, Burton expressed some of Evatt's ideas. These included the suggestion that Australia and New Zealand should develop common trade, foreign and defence policies. This partly was to combat the adverse effects of the fact that Australia and New Zealand were trade competitors on the world market. He went as far as to suggest that in time Australians and New Zealanders should have full rights of common citizenship and full freedom of movement as well as a common currency and customs union.⁴ Burton knew that Evatt had long believed that if Australia and New Zealand acted together they would be in a more favourable position to influence Britain and the United States. Burton wrote that 'The Minister [Evatt] has indicated on a number of occasions that he believes a more effective tie-up between Australia and New Zealand might place us in a better position from a point of view of political and economic discussions with the United Kingdom and the United States.'⁵ This essentially was Evatt's main motivation for close trans-Tasman relations: to increase Australia's bargaining power with Britain and the United States.

In response to Evatt's speech in parliament, the Australian Department of External Affairs suggested on 16 October that he should arrange talks with New Zealand in Canberra. Accordingly, on 21 October, Evatt spoke to Berendsen about his speech in the House. He planned to call a conference of all governments interested in the Southwest and South Pacific to consider defence and post-war problems. He believed the future prosperity and safety of Australia and New Zealand depended on their having a decisive voice in the Pacific. Evatt then proposed a preliminary conference between Australian and New Zealand ministers to discuss post-war security in the South Pacific, and the future of various Pacific islands (including some that were under United States, British, French, Portuguese and

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Burton to Hodgson, 13 October 1943, *DAFP VI*, Doc 297.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Dutch control). He also wanted to discuss aviation, 'social betterment' and economic development. This was intended as a first step before discussions with the other governments interested in the Southwest Pacific. Berendsen wrote that Evatt 'is inclined to suggest that it would be wise for Great Britain to transfer all British colonies in these areas to Australia and New Zealand, Australia gradually to take Solomon's area and NZ to take Fiji etc.' Berendsen reported that Evatt believed that Australia and New Zealand should play an important role in the Pacific since they were 'particularly qualified to do so by their special knowledge and experience.'⁶

McIntosh in Wellington disagreed with Evatt's position. He said 'I would like to observe at this point that I think it is wrong and also stupid for Australia and New Zealand to discuss the disposal of the Pacific Islands in the absence of United Kingdom representatives.'⁷ Moreover, he continued, the Governor-General had copies of Berendsen's telegrams from Evatt and they would be passed on to the British. The end result would probably be that Britain would 'feel that Australia and New Zealand are behaving a little queerly.'⁸ McIntosh believed that the notion that Britain should hand over its colonial possession in the Pacific to Australia and New Zealand because of their 'special knowledge and experience' was absurd. More bluntly, he said 'Personally, I think it will be a case of handing the matter over to what the *New Yorker* would call "The Department of Utter Chaos."⁹ McIntosh's views show that New Zealand was still acting within the 'imperial framework' and was sensitive to Britain's views. The Australian government attached far less importance to the views of Britain.

Evatt wanted the proposed Australian-New Zealand conference to take place in November 1943. Berendsen replied on 1 November that the New Zealand government agreed to 'take part in a preliminary exchange of views as suggested and also in any further conference to be attended, inter alia, by representatives of the United Kingdom on matters of common interest relating to the post-war political settlement in the Pacific'.¹⁰ However, the conference could not be held then because Fraser was twice hospitalised in November.

⁶ Berendsen to Fraser, 21 October 1943, *DNZER I*, Doc 35.

⁷ McIntosh to Berendsen; 29 November 1943; McGibbon, *Undiplomatic Dialogue*, p 41.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *DAFP VI*, p 558n.

Although only a few hours after the second operation he told McIntosh he had never felt better, he had in fact nearly died. In New Zealand, foreign policy was centred around the Prime Minister who held the External Affairs portfolio and his bad health held up any decisions. Berendsen suggested to Evatt that the conference be held from 13-18 December. Evatt replied that this would clash with the Australian Labor Party Conference. New Zealand was not willing to send a delegation to Canberra without Fraser and so told the Australia government that the conference would have to be postponed until January 1944. ⁷ Churchill, meanwhile, had suggested that a Prime Minister's meeting be held in London in early December 1943, but Curtin was reluctant to leave until April 1944 and indicated this to Churchill twice (on 23 & 30 October 1943).

The first that Ronald Cross, Britain's High Commissioner in Australia, heard of Evatt's planned Australian-New Zealand conference was through a telegram that he received from Batterbee in Wellington on 7 December 1943. Cross then asked Curtin if this conference was to agree upon views about local defence and regional councils for colonial administration. While Curtin agreed that this would be discussed, he added that many other minor local matters would be discussed. He gave as an example the shortage of hides in Australia that were needed to make boots for the Australian army and for the United States' forces.¹¹ Curtin did not welcome Cross's interest in the upcoming Australian-New Zealand talks. He realised that if the British were present at the conference, then they would expect to dominate the proceedings. This was what Curtin wanted to avoid. He wanted the Australian delegation to take the lead. After the conference Cross realised that Curtin's explanation was at best misleading. Cross believed, naively, that it was quite possible that at this stage Curtin did not know the true nature of the proposed conference, because it was Evatt's baby. This assumption of Curtin's ignorance is hard to believe. It would be most peculiar for an international conference to be organised, while the Prime Minister of the host country remained ignorant of the nature of the conference.

Evatt's determination that Australia would burst onto the world stage as an important player was again demonstrated on 28 December 1943. In a public statement he

¹¹ Cross to Cranborne; 27 January 1944, *British Views of the Canberra Pact*. (Public Record Office, London)

announced that, after the Australian-New Zealand conference in January, there would be a conference held in Australia of all powers with interests in the Southwest Pacific.

After this speech, Cross attempted to gain more information from him about the purpose and scope of the upcoming Australian-New Zealand conference. Cross found Evatt and the officials at the External Affairs Department uninformative. He said that 'an atmosphere of secretiveness which must have been a deliberate policy' prevailed both before and during the conference.¹² About a week before the conference opened Hodgson said that consideration was being given to providing Britain with more information about the upcoming conference. Nothing eventuated. In retrospect, Cross regarded the 'air of mystery' which surrounded this conference as both unnecessary and as an attempt to increase the impact and presence of Evatt. The purpose of this secrecy, however, was to keep Britain in the dark about the Canberra conference. Evatt was determined to take charge. He wanted this opportunity to persuade New Zealand to act as Australia wanted, without the distracting influence of Britain.

Evatt's motivation for the Australia-New Zealand conference of January 1944 was largely derived from the way the big four (Britain, the Soviet Union, China and the United States) were inclined to organise things that would affect Australia and New Zealand without consulting them. From as early as 1942, the United States Navy was keen to secure Pacific bases from which it could operate its forces. Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy, also owned the *Chicago Daily News*. An editorial printed in late 1942 stated the Navy's position. To operate effectively in the Pacific, the Navy needed a series of American bases. The editorial continued that it 'should be for the Navy to say what bases it requires, and where And if our Navy finds it needs bases in Australasian or Dutch East Indian waters, our Australian and Dutch friends can certainly be counted on, in the circumstances, to co-operate.'¹³ The Australian and New Zealand governments were apprehensive about the United States' eagerness for bases, particularly in Australasian territory. Throughout 1943 and 1944 the United States Navy's demands for bases in the Pacific became insistent

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Lissington, *NZ and US*, p 78.

and unrelenting. By March 1944 the Chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee simply said 'we will just take them'.¹⁴

The Tasman neighbours' concern had been raised by comments Roosevelt made at the 29th meeting of the Pacific War Council on 31 March 1943. Roosevelt had already talked to Eden, who was now the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and to Halifax, the British Ambassador to the United States, about the post-war Pacific. Roosevelt expected that Japanese territory would probably be administered by China and the United States, while Korea, it was felt, was not yet ready for self-government. The precise future control of the Pacific had not been decided but it was clear that Britain and the United States were taking the initiative.¹⁵ This was demonstrated in the Cairo Declaration on 1 December 1943 which described Allied intentions in the war against Japan. Although, both Australia and New Zealand were engaged in war against Japan, neither was associated with the declaration, and neither was consulted about it or even informed.

Curtin and the Australian government were greatly disturbed that they were not consulted about the Cairo Declaration in spite of their great war efforts against the Japanese. They felt that if they did not protest, their position would become impossible when they did want to have some influence at the peace talks that would follow the war. Evatt was particularly incensed that Australia was not consulted. Nelson Johnson, the United States Minister to Australia, believed this motivated Evatt to ensure that Australia and New Zealand would act together to demand to be heard by the larger powers. Johnson wrote 'I am certain that Dr. Evatt has resented the Cairo Conference more than any other event which has thus far occurred.'¹⁶ Australian ministers seriously considered a public protest, but decided to settle upon a personal telegram to Churchill expressing these sentiments.¹⁷ However, no such telegram has been traced and it does not seem that one was sent.

Fraser sympathised with Curtin and shared his disappointment that neither country was consulted. Yet Wellington did not protest either. Berendsen said that he was 'rather

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 79.

¹⁵ Cox to Fraser, 31 March 1954, *DNZER I*, Doc 32.

¹⁶ Quoted in Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, p 290.

¹⁷ Berendsen to Fraser, 4 December 1943, *DNZER I*, Doc 40.

sorry that no action was taken in Wellington'¹⁸ in response to the Cairo Declaration. He reflected that it was now apparent that 'we shall have to fight very hard to have any say at all in world affairs'.¹⁹ On 10 December Berendsen communicated his concerns to McIntosh: 'Churchill and Roosevelt - and God bless them - are determined to run this war themselves, and I think it quite probable that Britain and America will attempt to run the world after the war.'²⁰ Concerns about the shape of the postwar Pacific were prevalent in the minds of both the Tasman neighbours. Berendsen's emphatic answer was that New Zealand 'simply must take part in the Pacific War if our Allies are expected to allow us any say in post-war events in that area.'²¹ The New Zealand government had already rejected the possibility of withdrawing the 2nd division from the Mediterranean Theatre to reinforce the Pacific.

Roosevelt also considered the postwar Pacific at the Pacific War Council meeting on 12 January 1944. He said that the hundreds of mandated Japanese islands must be taken away from Japan but was unsure which country should administer them. He was adamant that New Caledonia should not be returned to the French and suggested that it should be jointly administered by Australia and New Zealand.²² Nash, New Zealand's representative, asserted that New Zealand's interests in the Pacific went as far east as the Society and Tuamotu Islands. The United States government did not welcome or appreciate such assertiveness by New Zealand in the Pacific. 'President Roosevelt laughingly suggested that since they were so very ambitious perhaps New Zealand should extend its control to Australia.'²³

The New Zealand delegation gave little prior thought to the Canberra conference and had no clearly defined, coherent policy to follow. Thomas George de Largie D'Alton, the recently appointed Australian High Commissioner in Wellington, tried to find out what the New Zealand approach to the conference would be. He wrote to Evatt: 'what has impressed me generally has been the scarcity of thought which has as yet [on 5 January

¹⁸ Berendsen to McIntosh, 20 December 1943, McGibbon, *Undiplomatic Dialogue*, p 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Berendsen to McIntosh, 10 December 1943, *Ibid.*, p 47.

²¹ Berendsen to McIntosh, 20 December 1943, *Ibid.*, p 52.

²² Dixon to Australian Department of External Affairs, 13 January 1944; *DAFP VII*; (Canberra, 1988) Doc 13.

²³ Quoted in Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, p 234.

1944] been given here to the major topics on which it is hoped to reach agreement.’²⁴

D’Alton said that he was endeavouring to stimulate the New Zealand delegation to formulate their views so that they can be expressed fully at the conference. He told them that Australia was preparing fully. However, D’Alton believed that although the New Zealand delegation had given little thought to the conference, he expected results as Fraser was a man who made decisions, while those accompanying him were expected to play only a minor role in the proceedings.

Although he had been told very little about the nature of the Australia-New Zealand conference, Cross was asked by Evatt to give a speech welcoming the New Zealand delegation. Cross said that he pleaded that he be excused from this speech as he was feeling “swimmy” in the head²⁵ from a recent airplane trip. However, Curtin would not accept this and pressed him again. He reluctantly agreed. Cross gave a general speech thanking Curtin for the privilege of giving a speech here especially as he understood the conference to be concerned with domestic matters. In retrospect, Cross suspected that Evatt was hoping that he would say something that would indicate British support for the conference.²⁶ This was certainly the case and the very fact that Cross agreed to speak made it seem that he supported the conference. Then, once he had spoken, he was ushered out of the conference and kept in the dark about the proceedings. When he gained an interview with Curtin on Wednesday 19 January, the latter agreed that the next logical step was to discuss with Britain the conclusions of this conference. However, Curtin would not discuss any details and only said that the conference ‘had proved highly satisfactory, the agreement was already being drafted, and it would be signed on Friday.’²⁷ The Australian delegation was running circles around Cross, using him to welcome the New Zealand delegation to symbolically give Britain’s blessing to the conference and then deliberately keeping him in the dark throughout the duration of the conference.

From Wellington, Batterbee sent a telegram to Sir Eric Machtig with information he had gained about the proceedings of the Canberra Conference. He said that F.E. Cumming-

²⁴ D’Alton to Evatt; 5 January 1944; *DAFP VII*; Doc 5.

²⁵ Cross to Cranborne; 27 January 1944, *British Views*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Bruce, the Assistant Secretary at the British High Commission in Wellington, had a conversation with an official of the New Zealand Department of External Affairs who was present at the Canberra Conference. After this conversation Cumming-Bruce wrote down confidential impressions that he had gained about the conference. Although this official claimed that his comments were only a 'tentative assessment' they were nevertheless revealing insights into how the conference was run and who dominated the proceedings.²⁸ The New Zealand delegation arrived in Canberra in January 1944 with little preparation for the conference. They were aware of the agenda but were ignorant of any details or of any Australian proposals. The Department of External Affairs had written a paper suggesting what the New Zealand attitude should be going into this conference. It was intended that the members of the delegation would discuss the paper amongst themselves when they arrived in Canberra. However, when they arrived, Evatt handed them a paper outlining the views of the Australian Department of External Affairs. Consequently, the paper written by the New Zealand Department of External Affairs was not discussed, worse still it was not even read by the members of the New Zealand delegation. Instead of considering their own views as originally planned, they were discussing the views that were expressed in Evatt's paper.²⁹ From the outset Evatt was stamping his authority upon the proceedings. Not even the full Australian delegation had seen Evatt's paper. When the conference began Eddie Ward, the Australian Minister for Transport and External Territories, was annoyed that the New Zealand delegation (which he referred to as the 'opposing team') was given this paper which, he and other member of the Australian delegation had not seen.³⁰

The conference itself was conducted more as an informal ministerial meeting than as an international conference. The proceedings were unstructured, unbusinesslike and unsystematic from the outset. Curtin arrived late to the designated committee room. When he arrived, he thought that the room was too small and insisted that the conference take place in the House of Representatives. Once arriving there it was discovered that the lights had been removed for cleaning. Consequently, the conference began an hour late when the

²⁸ F.E. Cumming-Bruce, Confidential Impressions of a NZ Official on his return from the Australian-NZ Conference at Canberra, 31 January 1944: Enclosed in telegram from Batterbee to Machtig, 9 February 1944, *British Views*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

lights had been replaced.³¹ Because of the late start, many items on the agenda had to be rushed through or were not considered. For example it was agreed that closer consultation between New Zealand and Australia should be maintained but how this was to be done on a practical level was not considered. In general the New Zealand delegation accepted about 75% of Australia's proposals immediately and the remaining 25% were discussed. The immediate agreement was because they had examined Evatt's paper when they arrived in Canberra. Australia conceded most of the 25% to New Zealand. However these concessions were relatively minor, toning down some of the more extreme measures of the agreement. This included agreeing to omit a sub paragraph in which Australia and New Zealand would tell Britain that they would allow Britain and the United States to form an Anglo-American condominium over the Line Islands. The most significant disagreement was that the New Zealand delegation strongly wanted Britain to retain its possessions in the Pacific. It said that if Australia wanted to take the Solomons from the British that was their business and New Zealand wanted no part of it. The New Zealand delegation also had reservations about boldly asserting that the Tasman neighbours would police the Southwest and South Pacific areas after the war without the approval of an international conference. However, the final version of the Agreement did not take into consideration New Zealand's reservations on this issue. New Zealand also had reservations about Australia's desire that the Tasman neighbours control civil aviation and conduct services between both countries and New Caledonia, New Hebrides, the Solomons, New Guinea and Timor. There was also some disagreement over whether to conclude regional peace treaties before global peace treaties.³²

Throughout the conference Evatt dominated the debates and was largely responsible for drawing up the draft of the Australia-New Zealand Agreement. Typically, most of this was done late at night when the delegates were tired and unable to scrutinise Evatt's proposals adequately. The rather informal nature of the conference was illustrated by the conduct of Paddy Webb, the New Zealand Postmaster-General and Minister of Labour. His contribution to the conference was a speech that he gave at a luncheon about industrial relations in coal mines. He boldly asserted that no war time strike in New Zealand had

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Report of the Committee on the Agenda Presented by Evatt to the Australian-New Zealand Conference on 18 January 1944, Pacific Conference Papers: Agenda No. 3; *Documents 1*, Doc 45.

lasted more than two days - a claim which was totally untrue and one that he would not have been expected to make when he was sober. For two hot afternoons during the proceedings of the conference he slept soundly while the discussions continued around him.³³ After the conference, he decided to visit Mrs Curtin and he was last heard to be stranded in the desert on his way to Western Australia.³⁴

Evatt and Curtin wanted the Agreement to be published immediately, while Fraser had assumed that it would not be published at all. Fraser had not sent a copy or even a summary of the Agreement to Wellington or discussed its contents with his colleague there. To avoid disappointing Evatt and Curtin, after the minor concessions they had made in the conference, he let the Agreement be published when the Australians allowed that it was an agreement and not a treaty. Consequently, Fraser's colleagues in Wellington were annoyed that they had been ignored and were not consulted about the Australian-New Zealand Agreement. Fraser had not discussed it with them as he would have liked to have done.³⁵

After the conference, Cross had the opportunity to speak with Evatt about his motives for calling the conference. Evatt told Cross what he wanted to hear. He said that it was mainly due to trans-Tasman anxiety at the United State's tendency to infiltrate into Pacific Islands south of the equator. He said that the conference was also designed to strengthen the Tasman neighbours' hands in their dealings with the United States. He said that it was to strengthen the influence of the British Commonwealth in the Pacific adding that there was a belief that Britain conceded too easily to the United States in the Pacific.³⁶ While accepting these reasons for the conference, Cross was concerned at the secrecy surrounding it both before it started and during its proceedings. He had found that when he had approached the Prime Minister and other officials he was fed information that was too vague to be of any use.

³³ F.E. Cumming-Bruce, Confidential Impressions of a NZ Official on his return from the Australian-NZ Conference at Canberra, 31 January 1944: Enclosed in telegram from Batterbee to Machtig, 9 February 1944, *British Views*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Memo by Cranborne to British War Cabinet; 2 February 1944, *British Views*.

Cumming-Bruce believed that Evatt had three motives for proposing the Australian-New Zealand agreement. Firstly, he wanted himself and the Department of External Affairs to make the headlines. Secondly, he wanted the Australian public and many of the politicians to see the big picture and to realise the importance of external affairs. For example, Curtin seemed to be so absorbed with domestic affairs that he was reluctant to leave for the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Meeting in London. Finally, Evatt wanted to make it clear to the United States and Britain that Australia was determined to play a dominant role in the Southwest Pacific.³⁷

Cumming-Bruce's confidential source managed to fool him into believing that Australia's failure to supply Britain with information about the Canberra conference and resulting pact was nothing more than an oversight. This source said that it was not deliberate. Instead, the Australian delegation had assumed that the next stage would be to consult Britain. This taken as read, they had not felt that it was necessary to inform Britain. Cumming-Bruce's source chose not to mention that the Agreement had already been signed by the Australian and New Zealand delegation and consequently it was too late for consultation. It would be a case of telling the British government what Australia had done after the event, when it was too late for it to have any influence or say in the matter. Cumming-Bruce's source told him that 'As the existence of air is not appreciated by animals, so the main axioms of Empire relations were taken for granted to such an extent that they hardly emerged into consciousness and were not seriously questioned.' This could not have been further from the truth, yet Cumming-Bruce was convinced. He believed that the Australian delegation was in many respects unrealistic. He continued that

Paradoxically the deep-rooted acceptance of British ties was responsible for any apparent ignoring of United Kingdom interest in the proceedings of the Conference: consultation in due course was taken for granted, and it never entered the Australian heads that the United Kingdom would wish to be consulted in the preliminary process of clearing up their own ideas.³⁸

Evatt, who had been staunchly anti-British since 1942, would have been quietly amused to hear this, yet Cumming-Bruce was convinced. This was because it was what the British government wanted to hear. It did not want to accept that Evatt had deliberately kept the

³⁷ F.E. Cumming-Bruce, *Confidential Impressions ... at Canberra*, 31 January 1944: Enclosed in telegram from Batterbee to Machtig, 9 February 1944, British Views

³⁸ *Ibid.*

British in the dark. They were not receptive to the reality that the power of the Empire-Commonwealth in the Pacific had dramatically declined, and that Australia and New Zealand were pursuing independent foreign policies without consulting Britain first.

The Australian-New Zealand Agreement (known as the Canberra Pact) was signed on 21 January 1944. The text of the Agreement was long and its scope was considerable. It covered a wide variety of topics including security and defence, civil aviation, dependencies and territories, welfare and advancement of native peoples in the Pacific, migration and machinery for co-operation. The main purpose of the Agreement was a demand by the Tasman neighbours to have 'representation at the highest level'³⁹ of all armistice and postwar discussions on international peace. Not only did they wish to be represented but they wanted to 'actively participate'⁴⁰ in any armistice commission. They referred to the Moscow Declaration of October 1943 that expressed the intentions of its signatories to establish an international organisation to maintain peace and security. In the transitional period from war to peace the Australian and New Zealand governments were willing to police or assist in the policing in the Southwest Pacific. One section stated that any power that constructed or used any military, naval or air installations during the war on land did not automatically have a claim to keep the land after the war. This was directed at the United States. The Tasman neighbours said that a change in sovereignty over any part of the Pacific could occur only after the agreement of the Australian and New Zealand governments had been secured. Section 34 caused much resentment in political circles in Britain and the United States. It stated that the Australia government was to call a conference to discuss the Pacific and that 'in addition to the two Governments' (Australia and New Zealand), Britain, the United States, the Netherlands, the French Committee of National Liberation and Portugal would be invited.

Consultation and co-operation between the Australian and New Zealand governments formed an important part of this agreement. To ensure effective trans-Tasman consultation permanent secretariats were to be established one on each side of the Tasman. The New Zealand Department of External Affairs was to appoint an Australian-New Zealand Affairs Secretariat in Wellington and the Australian Department of External Affairs

³⁹ The Australian-New Zealand Agreement, clause 7, *DNZER I*, Doc 53.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

was to appoint an Australian-New Zealand Affairs Secretariat in Canberra. Their roles were to ensure that the goodwill of the Canberra Conference and Agreement was maintained and that effective consultation continued. On 12 February, Robert Thomas George Patrick was appointed by the New Zealand Department of External Affairs to the Australian-New Zealand Affairs Secretariat in Wellington. He was to maintain daily contact with the Australian Liaison Officer and have regular meetings with the Australian High Commissioner, the Minister of External Affairs if necessary and the Secretary of External Affairs.⁴¹

Batterbee had doubts that the Australian-New Zealand agreement would lead to lasting trans-Tasman consultation. He wrote that it 'remains to be seen whether the provisions of the Agreement will last and develop into something of value. The New Zealand authorities believe that they will rapidly become a dead letter so far as Australian consultation with New Zealand is concerned, and New Zealand is not likely to be disposed to continue to observe without reciprocity.'⁴² Berendsen was also cynical about the lasting effects of the Agreement upon trans-Tasman relations. In an interview held many years after the event he recalled thinking 'I do not consider the Pact was worth a kettle of fish although there were some high hopes that it might develop into something valuable.'⁴³ However, Berendsen's comments may have been influenced by the miserable time that he had experienced as New Zealand's High Commissioner in Australia.

The public reaction of the British government to the Canberra Pact was surprisingly mild. The first official information Britain received about the Australia-New Zealand conference was on 30 December from the Australian High Commissioner in London. Also on that day Batterbee had said that Fraser wanted to know Britain's opinion about the conference.⁴⁴ Cranborne, the Dominion Secretary, noted that it was 'unfortunate' that Australia and New Zealand had organised, held and published the agreement without consulting the British government. There was some irritation felt in the British War Cabinet at the lack of consultation, but it was felt that this should in no way be communicated to

⁴¹ *DNZER I*, p 147n.

⁴² Batterbee to Machtig, 9 February 1944; *British Views*.

⁴³ *Henderson Interview with Berendsen*, p 21.

⁴⁴ Memo by Cranborne to British War Cabinet, 2 February 1944, *British Views*.

Evatt. Cranborne believed that it was important to avoid giving the impression that Britain was applying any form of 'grandmotherly restraint by the mother country.'⁴⁵ He continued on a more positive note that 'on a broad view, I feel that the Conference may well have some useful results.'⁴⁶ He welcomed Australia's and New Zealand's interest in playing a role in the defence of the Pacific and believed that this agreement could be important in the post war period. He also welcomed closer relations between members of the Commonwealth and hoped that this would improve trans-Tasman relations. The main consideration of Britain's War Cabinet that day was to prepare a response to be sent to the Australian and New Zealand governments. Cranborne felt that organising an international conference in the Pacific at this stage would be a mistake. It would be premature especially since Britain had not had time to examine the issues and discuss them with Australia and New Zealand. He wanted the British government to consult with the Australian and New Zealand governments before any international conference were called, believing that it was premature, especially while much territory was still occupied by the enemy. The security of the Pacific could not be considered in isolation from other general postwar settlements. Cranborne felt that Churchill and Roosevelt would need to agree upon some general principles for world peace before any arrangements in the Pacific could be made.⁴⁷ Britain was also concerned that it did not know what the United States' views and intentions were and felt it was important to know this before attending such a conference.

To draw attention to certain aspects of the Australia-New Zealand agreement Curtin and Fraser sent a joint telegram to Cranborne on 25 January 1944. It was basically a request for Britain's views. The Dominions Office gave the official British response to the Australia-New Zealand Agreement on 12 February. It was carefully worded and open minded. It opened by commenting that Britain understood that the Canberra meeting was to encourage Australian-New Zealand co-operation. Members of the British government fully supported the strengthening of relations between dominions and hoped that the meeting had achieved this objective. They welcomed the willingness of the Australian and New Zealand governments to participate in international peace keeping bodies and in post war talks. They also welcomed Australia's and New Zealand's readiness to accept

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

responsibility for the defence of the Pacific. However, they were cautious in their comments about Evatt's plans to call an international conference. Pointing out that this was the first that they had heard of this proposal, Cranborne commented that the government would need time to consider the issues involved and to formulate a British policy and approach, before attending any international conference about the Pacific. He continued that a general concept or framework of international peace was necessary, and that in this respect, the concept of a regional pact was not ideal. Both the Australian and New Zealand governments agreed that peace was indivisible and could not be maintained by regional pacts. Neither country was striving for a regional pact, and they were reluctant to convey the impression that they were. Generally, the British government believed that a Pacific conference would be premature but said that it was willing to discuss any of the issues raised at the Canberra conference with Australian and New Zealand leaders. Cranborne suggested that the upcoming Prime Ministers' Meeting in London would be the ideal opportunity.⁴⁸ On the whole, apart from the lack of consultation, the British government felt that the agreement contained many positive aspects. It was particularly keen for Australia and New Zealand to increase their roles in the defence of the Pacific.

The British government reacted favourably to the Australian-New Zealand Agreement because they did not see it as a dramatic evolution in the foreign policy of Australia and New Zealand, but as a constructive innovation. Cranborne told Nash that the British government 'had been delighted with it [the Australian-New Zealand Agreement] and ... we thought that it had initiated a new and valuable inter-Imperial link.'⁴⁹ They did not see that the Tasman neighbours were asserting their voices without consulting the Mother Country because the Empire-Commonwealth had been superseded by a new international order. The attitude of Christopher Eastward, from the Colonial Office, to the Agreement was typical. Eastward wrote that although 'the two Dominions set about the matter rather tactlessly (the more wary New Zealanders being pushed into it by the Australians), on the whole the agreement between them seems to be rather a good document.'⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Dominion Office to Australian and New Zealand governments; 12 February 1944; *British Views*.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Louis, *Imperialism at Bay*, p 302.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p 304.

In contrast to the British, some Americans were highly incensed by the Australian-New Zealand Agreement. Louis sums up the United States reaction as 'suppressed outrage' but says that the 'State Department officials restrained their indignation because they did not want to give Evatt the satisfaction of knowing the extent of the provocation.'⁵¹ Consequently, the New Zealand government was not aware of the full extent of the American reaction until Fraser visited Washington in April 1944. John Hickerson, head of the Division of British Commonwealth Affairs, urged that the United States should not bother taking this agreement seriously. He described it as 'manifestly ridiculous.'⁵² The State Department compared it with Japanese foreign policy before the war describing the agreement as 'bordering on a "co-prosperity sphere" for Australia'⁵³ created by Evatt. The Joint Strategic Survey Committee printed a report on 4 March 1944 analysing the Australian-New Zealand Agreement. This committee assessed the military capabilities of Australia and New Zealand and concluded that the 'implication in the Australian-New Zealand Agreement that these countries are capable of defending all or part of these islands has no foundation in reality.'⁵⁴ The obvious conclusion was how then, could they be expected to defend Pacific Island territories when they could not defend themselves? The Joint Chiefs of Staff felt that the Australian-New Zealand Agreement was absurd.

On 4 February Prescott Childs, Charge d' Affaires of the United States Legation in Wellington, handed a message to Fraser from Hull. Hull said that he understood the desire of Australia and New Zealand to make an agreement on items of common concern. But, he continued on a different note, 'I am frankly disturbed ... at the proposal of the two governments to call an early conference of powers with territorial interests in the South and Southwest Pacific to consider the problem of regional security and related matters.'⁵⁵ Roosevelt also agreed that it was too soon to consider such a conference and this had already been indicated unofficially to the Australian government. Such a conference might have adverse effects upon the maintenance of a united war effort. It would focus upon conflicting opinions and downplay areas of agreement. Hull said that Fraser should have discussions with himself before any conference was called. The real reason for Hull's

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p 306.

⁵² *Ibid*.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ Childs to Fraser; 4 February 1944; *DNZER I*, Doc 59.

opposition to the international conference was because he was adamant that if any such conference was to be called, it would be called by the United States, not by a small dominion in the Southwest Pacific.

Curtin and Fraser both agreed to visit Washington in April 1944 on their way to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers meeting in London. Hull took this opportunity to dress down both Fraser and Nash (who accompanied him) about the Australian-New Zealand Agreement. He said that it was outspoken and directed against the United States. Curtin received similar treatment when he visited Hull. On 25 April, Curtin had lunch with Roosevelt. Afterwards they spoke about the Australian-New Zealand Agreement. Roosevelt said that he assumed that it had been mainly the work of Evatt. Curtin agreed. Roosevelt commented that 'it will be best for us to forget the whole incident'.⁵⁶

Admiral King, the United States Chief of Naval Operations was exasperated by the Australian-New Zealand agreement. This was not surprising given the intentions of the United States Navy to secure bases in the Pacific. In May 1944, King refused to allow New Zealand squadrons[†] participate in operations against the central Pacific Islands. Fraser instructed Nash to seek an interview with King. Nash did so and realised that King had taken the Australian-New Zealand Agreement personally. It was not until the matter had been referred to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that New Zealand was allowed a continuing limited role in the Pacific War.

Why did the United States react so strongly to the Australian-New Zealand Agreement? It labelled the agreement as a regional pact - a perception which Australia and New Zealand had hoped to avoid. The United States government was particularly sensitive to the Tasman neighbours challenging American infiltration into the Pacific. The Pacific was regarded by it as an American pond. It was the United States which was directing the war in the Pacific. It was American blood that was being spilt. It was the strength of the United States fleet that turned back the Japanese fleet at the crucial battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. Australia and New Zealand benefited from these crucial battles. The combined numerical contribution of the Australian and New Zealand war effort beside that

⁵⁶ Note by Brown of Conversation between Curtin and Roosevelt; 25 April 1944; *DAFP VII*; Doc 116.

of the United States was small. Consequently, the United States was not going to allow two small powers to dictate that their permission was necessary before any land in the Pacific could change hands. Evatt's intention to call an international conference of all powers interested in the South and Southwest Pacific evoked a particularly sour response from the United States. It was determined that this would not happen. The Australian government's determination to call an international conference to discuss the Pacific was seen as outrageous and insulting. The United States had assumed that it would be the country to call such a conference. Even the United States calling such a conference was an unlikely scenario. This was because the United States preferred to discuss the shape of the post-war Pacific in privacy with British, Russian and Chinese authorities, without the interference of small nations like Australia and New Zealand.

Berendsen was surprised by the reactions of Britain and the United States to the Australia New Zealand Agreement. He said that he 'expected much greater repercussions'⁵⁷ than what happened. He expected that publishing the Agreement would cause 'quite a large splash' but it seems 'that it has only made a ripple or two'.⁵⁸ Strangely enough, McIntosh felt that the British and American reactions were quite strong and he seemed surprised at Berendsen's comments. He replied that 'if you (Berendsen) expected a reaction of greater intensity then I feel somewhat relieved at what actually did occur.'⁵⁹ These comments were before Fraser visited Washington and became aware of the outrage that the United States felt about this agreement.

On 15 February the British War Cabinet met and discussed the Australian-New Zealand agreement, where Cranborne revealed some fascinating insights into recent developments of trans-Tasman relations. Fraser had told Batterbee about the message that he and Curtin had received from Hull (through Prescott Childs) on 4 February about the United States response to the Canberra Pact. Fraser had replied to Hull that New Zealand would not call a conference before the Prime Ministers conference in London. Curtin said that he had wanted Australia and New Zealand to make identical replies to Hull. Fraser felt that this would be a mistake and felt that Britain should be informed about Hull's telegram.

⁵⁷ Berendsen to McIntosh, 21 February 1944, McGibbon, *Undiplomatic Dialogue*, p 65.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ McIntosh to Berendsen, 25 February 1944, *Ibid.*, p 67.

This was because it related to calling an international conference to which Britain would be invited. This comment shows that the New Zealand government was still operating within an imperial system, and felt that it ought to inform Britain of any new developments. While Curtin admitted that he had no intention of informing Britain he said that Fraser could do so if he so wished. Berendsen then told Curtin that Fraser had shown to Batterbee both the notes from Hull (via Childs) and the New Zealand reply. He said that Fraser thought that Curtin should inform Cross as the New Zealand government had informed Batterbee. Cranborne then revealed some confidential impressions that Batterbee had gained from Fraser about consultation with Australia. 'Speaking confidentially the Prime Minister [Fraser] said that he was rather glad that the incident had occurred as "it brought matters into the open"'. This incident was the difference of opinions over whether to inform Britain about what was happening. Batterbee continued saying that Fraser was 'secretly pleased that the Americans have immediately reacted, as he warned Curtin and Evatt that they would. He is also, I suspect, not entirely displeased that the practical difficulties of the provisions for consultation in the agreement are already being shown up.'⁶⁰ Batterbee also said that Fraser was pleased with Britain's reaction to the Australia-New Zealand Agreement. Batterbee wrote that 'To have shown any sign of soreness (and I think he realises that there is some ground for such a feeling) would have been a great mistake.'

Did the Australian-New Zealand Agreement achieve its objectives? Its main objective was to ensure that Australia and New Zealand would be consulted in the formation of post-war Pacific policy. The governments of Australia and New Zealand failed to achieve this. Both countries had little input into the Dumbarton Oaks Conference where the draft United Nations Charter was drawn up. Neither country was consulted about the Yalta conference which also discussed Japan. More importantly, neither was consulted about the Potsdam Declaration, which defined the terms of Japan's surrender. Even ensuring that their signatures appeared on the surrender document that was signed on the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945 proved to be a struggle.

An adverse consequence of the Australian-New Zealand Agreement was that it spelt the end of the Pacific War Council. Ironically, one of Australia's motivating forces for the

⁶⁰ Memo by Cranborne to War Cabinet; 15 February 1944; *British Views*.

agreement was its dissatisfaction with the Pacific War Council. Evatt was stung by Hull's criticisms of the agreement. He sent a note to Nelson Johnson, the United States Minister in Australia, to justify the actions of Australia and New Zealand.⁶¹ However, in doing so he breached the confidentiality of the Pacific War Council by citing three occasions when Roosevelt had mentioned the post-war Pacific. Roosevelt was outraged as the Pacific War Council kept no official minutes and its proceedings were unknown even by the State Department. Roosevelt used this incident as an excuse to dissolve the Council.

A minor success of the Agreement was that it did encourage trans-Tasman consultation. The flow of information across the Tasman did increase as the Secretariats in Wellington and Canberra maintained consultation. This led to the Australian-New Zealand meetings that were held in Wellington in November 1944. However, the momentum of trans-Tasman co-operation was soon lost for some years.

The greatest success of the Australian-New Zealand Agreement was the establishment of the South Pacific Commission in 1947. Even this was a watered down version of what Evatt had envisioned. It was an advisory body concerned with social and economic matters of the island peoples. It had no political or executive powers. This commission included members from Australia, New Zealand, Britain, the United States, France and the Netherlands.

The Australian-New Zealand Agreement failed to achieve its objectives with the two minor exceptions of increased trans-Tasman consultation and the South Pacific Commission. The agreement did not have any significant influence on the United States. It did not discourage the United States from infiltrating into the Pacific. More importantly, Australia and New Zealand were not consulted about the post-war Pacific. It was however, important as a statement of Australian and New Zealand foreign policy, clearly showing that both nations were determined to play a significant role in the South and Southwest Pacific.

Although not recognised as such at the time, the Australian-New Zealand Agreement was a landmark in trans-Tasman relations. It was the first formal agreement

⁶¹ See *DAFP VII*; Doc 56 for Evatt's breach of confidentiality.

signed between the two countries. Symbolically, it was important in recalling and cementing Anzac co-operation. Australians and New Zealanders had formed a close war-time bond on the slopes of Gallipoli in 1915, that was forgotten in the inter-war years. In the Second World War they had fought side by side in Greece, Crete and in North Africa. The Agreement was symbolic of the shared war experiences and common threats faced by Australians and New Zealanders in war. It also symbolised ~~of~~ the unity that was achieved ~~both~~ on the battlefields and politically when attempting to influence Britain and the United States. In the years to come when trans-Tasman relations were again reaching levels of indifference, Australia and New Zealand looked back to the Australian-New Zealand Agreement.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The nature of trans-Tasman relations changed dramatically on a number of occasions throughout the course of the Second World War. The Australian and New Zealand governments were drawn together twice to meet two uncomfortable outside influences - one a threatening invasion, and another affecting Australian freedom of action in the Pacific.

Before the war trans-Tasman relations had been severely limited, operating within an imperial framework that was centred upon London. The situation was such that Lieutenant Colonel Stevens commented that Australian and New Zealand governments heard about each other's activities through Committee of Imperial Defence papers from London.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 had little effect upon this situation, inspite of the attempt at co-ordination made in the Wellington defence conference in April 1939. Misunderstandings did result from the lack of consultation. This was demonstrated in November 1939 when the New Zealand government decided to send its expeditionary force overseas. Despite such misunderstandings the Australian and New Zealand governments independently followed similar policies without consultation. This was because they both adhered to and operated within the imperial framework. There was little desire within political or diplomatic circles on either side of the Tasman for closer trans-Tasman relations.

The opening of the Pacific war in December 1941 brought dramatic change. The Australian and New Zealand governments were both threatened by advancing Japanese forces. This first uncomfortable outside influence caused them to work closely together. They decided to act together to increase their influence in Washington to persuade the United States to do more to stop Japanese advances in the Pacific. Although Australia and New Zealand were small powers, they did gain some minor successes. These included the establishment of the Anzac Naval Command and the Pacific War Council. The Australian and New Zealand government's efforts gained them some consultation, but no real influence.

In the wider arena, the Japanese threat was significant because it marked the declining power of the Empire-Commonwealth in relation to the rising power of the United States in the Pacific. The United States forces met the Japanese threat at the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway in May and June 1942. The Australian and New Zealand governments reacted in different ways to these developments. The Australian government's relations with the Empire-Commonwealth soured dramatically. Curtin's government appeared to move out of the imperial framework and sought close relations with the United States. The New Zealand government, in contrast, was more inclined to remain within the imperial framework and did not react dramatically to the decline of the Empire-Commonwealth.

The Australian and New Zealand government's different reactions to the decline of the Empire-Commonwealth and rise of the United States were accentuated by their differing approaches to external affairs, particularly their contrasting diplomatic styles. Both the Tasman neighbours wanted more influence in Washington. However, the Australian government's approach to external affairs was forceful, robust and demanding while the New Zealand government was deferential to Britain and tactful to the United States. This was because the Australian government realised that the Empire-Commonwealth was in decline and that the new world order would be centred upon the United States. This was not the case for the New Zealand government which on one level was aware that the future lay with the United States but was reluctant to change and its external affairs approach was largely unchanged. Australia and New Zealand were small powers and despite their efforts, they exerted only minimal influence upon the United States. It was clear, though, that the Australian government's persistent approach was more successful in drawing attention to their concerns than the New Zealand government's polite requests.

When the threat of the Japanese had lessened, Australian-New Zealand relations became severely strained reaching crisis point in mid 1943. This crisis in relations highlighted the different understandings and approaches to relations with Britain and the United States that Australia and New Zealand had from 1942 onwards. The fundamental reason for the crisis in trans-Tasman relations was their differing policies regarding manpower and the location of their armed forces. While the Australian government bought

back its three divisions from the Middle East to fight in the Pacific theatre, New Zealand left its division to fight North Africa and then in Italy.

The second uncomfortable outside influence that united the Australian and New Zealand governments ironically came from their new ally and protector in 1942; the United States. After the Japanese had been turned back, the Australian government felt decidedly uncomfortable by the United States intentions in the Pacific. Evatt feared that the United States might succeed the Empire-Commonwealth in the Pacific. He wanted Australia and New Zealand to be the two major powers in the South Pacific and consequently did not welcome the United States' interest in this area. From October 1943, the Australian and New Zealand governments again developed close political relations. This was exemplified by the Australian-New Zealand Agreement of January 1944. Although not recognised as such at the time, the Australian-New Zealand Agreement was a landmark. Both countries were expressing their independent foreign policies in the Pacific. However, once the uncomfortable outside influence passed close trans-Tasman relations were lost for some years. The Australian-New Zealand Agreement was their first step towards the ANZUS Pact with the United States.

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